



The image features a large, three-line title in a stylized, blocky font. The top line is red with a white outline, the middle line is purple with a white outline, and the bottom line is blue with a white outline. The text is set against a background of a character wearing a golden crown and armor, standing in a dramatic, light-filled environment.

Б. А. ПРИЧАСТ. ИМ. Г. АРПЕР. ИМ. "СОВЕТСКАЯ РОССИЯ. ВОЛОНТЕРЫ ПОДДЕРЖАЛИ ПРОДОЛЖЕНИЕ АКЦИИ" В "ВОССТАНОВЛЕНЬИ" ВОЛОНТЕРЫ СКАЗАЛИ: "БЫЛЫЕ ВОЛОНТЕРЫ...

# Oh no! After I Reincarnated, My Moms Became Son-cons!

vol.7 – Epic of the Hero King: Sparkling  
Sand

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# Prologue

I really didn't return that night. No, it wasn't that I didn't want to return, but I couldn't. I couldn't let go of Elizabeth who was crying like she was crying a river. She was particularly coquettish that night. I almost couldn't stop my own urges. But I did manage to stop myself from crossing the boundary as her son. I held her in my arms and we fell asleep. I left early the next morning, thereby avoiding getting discovered. I will not do anything to my two moms no matter what. That's my bottom line. They're both my moms no matter what you say. I will never develop romantic feelings for my two moms.

Furthermore, I still have two wives which is enough... these two are enough.

"Good morning, dear."

When I woke up the next day, I saw Nier who was hugging me with a happy smile as beautiful as flowers looking at me. There's no way I'm going to own up to just getting into bed not long ago. I looked at her, smiled, kissed her lips and said: "Good morning, Nier. Did you sleep well last night?"

"Yes. I slept with you officially as the princess last night....." Nier rolled over and looked up at the roof. She stretched her hand out and looked at the ring on her hand. She revealed a blissful smile and said: "I packed up all of my stuff as a Valkyrie last night including my cape, clothes, and sword. From now on, I am the princess so I won't be using them anymore."

"Do you miss it?"

"Uhm. Somewhat. However, I'm looking forward to the future more. I'm looking forward to the future as the princess." Nier stood up and looked at her naked body. With a smile she then said: "Dear, let me say it again. Good morning. This is the first time I am greeting you as Princess Nier Galadriel Rosvenor."

The first day after getting married always makes one happy even if they have to go to work that day. I didn't sort out the matter with the elves last night so Freya and I need to take the next step in helping them settle down and delegating work. Luna only arranged their living needs after all. It's going to

take them a long time to adapt to life here in humanity. This is going to be a lengthy process. I believe those elves will soon be able to cohabit with humanity, right?

Freya who was walking next to me looked at me and said: "Onii-sama, you sure look happy, huh? It looks like you really like Princess Lucia and Princess Nier. But your majesty, you must remember your work now. You have quite a bit of work today. You must first help the group of elves settle down and Socina City's envoy seeks an audience as well."

"Hmm? Socina City's envoy? Isn't he in the city?"

I hesitated. Logically speaking, he doesn't need to seek an audience. He just needs to notify me. He must've just come to this city, which means that there isn't just one of them. This one must be a new one. I don't quite understand why another has come. Could it be for two different matters?

"That is correct. It looks like this one is different to the other one." Freya chuckled softly and elaborated, "Onii-sama, you must know that Socina City's lord isn't a single individual who rules it. Their city operates following a parliament system. The lord's orders and directives must be supported by majority vote by parliament members..... In other words, the orders or directives may only be carried out once the elders have given their approval. As such, the lord's powers have always been at loggerheads with the elders'. Further, the newly crowned lord may have different ideas to the elders. Subsequently, if the lord wants to have her own powers, money is the most important asset she requires. Thus, I think that the previous envoy was the lord's personal envoy. His so-called business deal was the lord's personal deal with us."

"So what you're saying is....."

"Correct. It is just as you assume. Socina City's lord and the elders must have some sort of grudge between them. Put another way, Socina's lord is disliked by the elders. Both parties need money to compete and so you have become the person they want to win over, onii-sama."

The corner of Freya's mouth turned up into a pleased smile. Actually, it would be more correct to describe it as a little devil's smile. It wasn't the sort of smile

a little girl who was cooking up an ill-intended mischievous scheme wore. Freya's schemes could shape-shift an entire political system. I think Freya wants me to get involved with this matter since a suzerain would benefit from being able to get involved with a vassal state's politics.

It would be best if we could control the vassal state's ruler as well. Though a vassal state is a vassal state, they're likely to have ideas, particularly if something happens to a suzerain. In that situation, the vassal state will definitely start trouble. Consequently, it's best for a suzerain to involve itself with a vassal states politics.

But maybe it's because the empress can't help being so far away from them that she doesn't have any plans for Socina City.

I quietly gave Freya a response: "Let's act according to the situation."

Freya took the hint and nodded. She knew what I meant. With a smile she responded: "You made it clear you were not participating in politics in the past, but you want to participate this time. It looks like you are set on becoming the emperor now, onii-sama."

"Sort of. I just have a good impression of the lord of Socina." I thought of the envoy. I have a very good impression of that envoy. An envoy is the representative of his ruler so the lord of Socina City must be an excellent ruler too. I naturally respect their ruler because she isn't a threat to me.

"Is that because the lord of Socina City is pretty?" The corner of Freya's smile crept up into a strange smile. She continued, "Onii-sama, are you more interested in your body? Did you want to use your male body to control their new lord? Onii-sama, you sure are interesting. Others use their attractive character or military might. Only you use your body."

"I didn't say that! I don't want to do that! I just thought... I just thought that if their envoy is courteous, and neither obsequious nor arrogant, then think that their lord shouldn't be too shabby. Therefore my impression of her isn't so bad. I've never seen her, but it definitely has nothing to do with whether or not she's pretty!"

"I know. But your reactions are still hilarious, onii-sama." Freya pursed her lips together and laughed. She then said, "All right, onii-sama. If you have decided

on who you will help, I shall go and.....”

I extended my hand out to stop her and said: “No. Don’t turn the new envoy down just yet. I’ll decide who to help after I meet them. At the very least, I need to know what the two of them are after exactly. Then I’ll decide who to help since I don’t know their lord, nor am I obligated to do something for her just because I randomly have a good impression of her.”

“You are right.” Freya gave a nod of approval. Standing in front of the palace gates, she made a small bow and added, “Onii-sama, you go and take care of the elves. I shall go and see the two envoys. I wish everything goes smoothly for you, onii-sama, Ah, also.....”

Freya chuckled softly. She then looked at me and sincerely congratulated me: “Congratulations on your wedding, onii-sama!”

## Ch. 01

After a period of working hard, I finally finished arranging everything for the elves. I arranged their living by having them live with human families that were willing to accept them. I arranged to have one elf to a household and tasked them with the extraction and production of elves' dye. That's saved me a lot of trouble. However, I paid attention to lots of things when I selected homes for them. I avoided having innocent girls stay with single guys. Something will happen. Something will definitely happen for sure.

Things here have been resolved. I massaged my shoulders and then returned to my palace.

"Onii-sama, the envoy from Socina City is waiting for you in the guest room. However..... Onii-sama, there is still an entire lunch break worth of time before we are due to meet so let us have lunch first."

Freya looked at me, smiled and went on, "Onii-sama, let's talk about the details over lunch since... I have already secretly met with the previous envoy and have managed to find out some information. In short, this case is very complicated. If we get involved and choose the right side, we will be able to make a big profit. If we choose wrong however... mm, we will need her majesty to get involved then."

I hesitated for a moment and then asked: "We need her majesty to personally get involved? Is it that serious?"

"The walls have ears, onii-sama. Miss Nier has prepared lunch." Freya wore a mysterious smile. I followed her into the kitchen while baffled myself. I don't know what's going to happen. Freya is similar to Castell in this aspect. They both say nothing when things are relatively chaotic. But Freya's smile is frankly quite soothing. It's not like Castell's which has a mocking vibe to it.

"Onii-sama, let me put it simply. After speaking to the both of them separately, I have an idea of what happened. In short, it's a clash of powers..... More precisely, the most important thing... is that the new lord is extremely naive."

I looked at Freya and asked: “Naive? Has that got something to do with this?”

Luna set up the tablecloth and then stepped back. Nier sat to one side and hummed a tune as she cut the meat in front of her. She doesn’t concern herself with my business. A better way to put it would be that she is the prince’s princess, not his vassal, so she has no right to stick her nose in his business.

It’s a good thing as I won’t have to deal with her trying to talk me into things. Such a princess is the best kind you could ask for.

“As I mentioned previously. Simply speaking, there are two parties in Socina’s parliament. It is not a contest over the inheritor or something because the late lord only had one wife and no kids. Therefore, the current lord was bound to succeed the throne so there is no issue there. The issue is that the elders cannot comprehend her ideas.”

Freya looked at me and chuckled. She then elaborated: “To be honest, I do not quite comprehend the things that envoy says either. But I understand it roughly as the female lord wants to share. Uhm, she wants to increase the living standards of her people like all businesses are to be state owned, to collect all the money, drastically increase the people’s earnings, to have the city determine the prices for all goods, all in order to allow everyone to lead stable lives.”

I lingered for a moment. Isn’t that a socialism prototype? A very similar prototype for that matter. That model was employed during the Soviet Union’s run, but it failed, didn’t it? It’s not going to work. Plus, you’re burying yourself if you do that when you don’t have enough capital to support it.

That has nothing to do with me. But I know for sure that it can’t be executed. If they try and execute it, Socina might not accomplish anything.

“But the elders of Socina City do not agree with it..... Of course, they are not disagreeing for the sake of Socina City, but purely because most of Socina City’s business are monopolised by said elders. If they all become state-owned, would they not be left without money? That is why the only thing they are thinking about is how to stop it from happening.”

“What are they going to do then?”

“Simply speaking, the most fundamental task is to prevent the female lord from having any capital. In other words, money. If they want to carry out that idea, money is a must. As long as they have sufficient funds, they will be able to bring the merchants on-board. Therefore, the lord requires money.”

Freya supinated her fingers, pondered something to herself and then continued, “The simplest solution is to do business. That means they need to find someone to do business with as well as goods. What the lord is looking for, is us. The good they are providing is... metal from the south. To be precise, a very important metal.”

“An important metal?”

Freya nodded and replied: “That is correct. I should say that it is the key to solving the most important issue we currently have. Onii-sama, do you know how many gun barrels you went through yesterday? Additionally, though the Earth Dragon Rider unit is formidable as a unit that charges the enemy lines, their guns and spear-tips all break. They become useless after one charge.”

I get that. I may have produced guns, but the materials used for the barrels are no good. They can fire consecutively but after four or five times, the barrels break. I’m helpless there. I didn’t learn about materials. The elves’ metal can satisfy our needs but they produce far too little of it. It’s nowhere near enough to support my normal usage requirements.

Only the imperial guards were able to use that sort of metal among the elves. Further, I can’t use the elves’ metal for nothing. It costs money. Everyone knows that relying on others to provide weapons is the equivalent of handing the rope around your neck to someone else. I don’t want to do that even if it’s Vyvyan we’re talking about.

Since that type of metal exists and humanity can produce it, it’s best that I possess it myself.

“And most interestingly, both parties offered to provide us with that type of metal. In other words, as long as we place our bets on the right team, either side will provide us that sort of metal. So you do not need to consider your gains at this point. The most important question has become, which party do you prefer?”

Which side do I prefer?

It's the same either way because if I let their lord go bankrupt, then she'll be completely bankrupt and therefore will be forced to obey me. In that scenario, she won't be a threat for my business. And if I bet on her winning, I can acquire those resources, plus, we'll have a more stable relationship with Socina City.

I'll benefit either way then.

But..... But.....

As I mentioned, relying on others to provide weapons is the equivalent of handing the rope around your neck to someone else.

"So, onii-sama, who do you want to support? Did you want to support the so-called representatives of the people, the elders who've already gained a monopoly on the businesses and have a stranglehold on the city's life-line, or that naive lord?"

"Neither."

I pressed down hard and cut deep into the steak in front of me so the juice stained my napkin. I looked at Freya and in a serious tone said: "I'm not supporting either side. I want the metal and I don't need anybody to trade with me. I want to possess the metal myself. It's in the desert, correct? I'll personally go and bring it here then!"

## Ch. 02

I've finished talking with the envoy from the elders of Socina City's side. I didn't agree to their request, but neither did I reject them. I don't want to see either of the envoys again so I had Freya tell them that I wouldn't be working again since I had just gotten married. However, I began preparations to head into the desert at the same time. It's just that I'm slightly reluctant to leave as I don't want to part with my wives. We did just get married after all.

"The desert? Ah, you're talking about the metal in the desert, right? Well if you want an opinion, their metal certainly is good quality, but the transportation and costs are very high so I rarely ever saw it. However, it certainly is very useful. If we had it, we could indeed use it to make gun-barrels and spear-tips."

The red-haired lady looked at me and then scrubbed her hair. She looked at the blueprint before her and continued, "But your majesty, if you want to purchase it directly from the desert in the south, it'll be too expensive. If you did that, your guard-unit would basically be a unit made out of gold. Would you bear to train them like usual then?"

I shook my head as I looked at her and responded: "I don't intend to buy metal. I want to go and find that type of metal because I heard that the metal they have is actually very cheap. The expensive part is mining it and the delivery fees. I want to go there and buy up a mineral mine. A new mine has supposedly been discovered there. All we need is a smelting method. As long as I have those two in my hands, I'll be able to get my hands on a mine, and I'll be able to transport the mined materials back here without a hitch."

"Isn't that good then? When I left last time, I went to the desert. There was indeed a rumour that a new mine was discovered deep in the desert. However, it hasn't be confirmed if it's true or not. But since you think that it's true, I'll take your word for it. It would be best if you could make it a reality because I really want to enjoy the pleasure of fiddling with that type of metal."

She laughed but I didn't leave. I continued while looking at her: "But I didn't

come here just to mention it.”

“Do you have other business with me then?”

She looked at me somewhat boggled since I never brought up anything else before. I respect her greatly so I never poke my nose into her business unnecessarily. I don’t mind how she runs the factory or what novel things she makes.

With my eyes on her, I sincerely said: “I hoped that you could come with me to the desert.”

She hesitated for a second then scratched her head and answered: “Ah, I thought that’s what you were going to say.....”

“Yes, you know about this metals stuff best, and if I am right, you went to look for it in the desert last time but were unsuccessful. I’m not familiar with the desert but I know how frightening the desert is. Without the help of someone who’s familiar with the desert, I’ll die in there for sure which is why I need your help. I need you to come with me to the desert. That way, I will feel a little safer.”

“Don’t you have anyone else to ask around you, your majesty? And if you need a guide, the five nations of the desert are all Elizabeth’s vassal states. Any of them can be your guide, right?”

“No, I don’t intend to reveal my identity this time. I’m not going to announce that I’m the prince of the Rosvenor Empire regardless of where I go, because there are two other powers that are competing for this metal like me as well. The two of them want to trade this metal with me. I didn’t reject or agree to their offer. In a situation like this where my position is ambiguous, if I reveal that I want to take it all for myself, we’ll only become hostile with each other with nothing for me to gain out of it.”

I looked at the red-haired lady and broke it down: “Further, there is no one I can send on the job. Freya needs to stay and manage the city’s affairs. I don’t want for Lucia and Nier to put themselves at risk again, not to mention the fact that Lucia is pregnant. Luna doesn’t know the desert so it’d be pointless to bring her along. Therefore, you are the only one I know who can help me.”

After listening to my explanation, she massaged her shoulders in a somewhat irritated fashion and responded: "Your majesty, I just came back from there not too long ago. And you also noticed that I went there to search for it to no avail. It's the first time you're searching for it so you're in high spirits and keen, but I've lost motivation."

I made a small bow and then said: "Please, sister. You are the only one left I can trust. You must help me. If you can help me, you can do as you please with the metal we acquire. You can do anything you like. As long as we can satisfy my unit's requirements I would even be willing to buy it off of you."

"Yeah?" She gave me a strange look then chuckled and said: "Raise your head, your majesty. How should I put it? Though I have always been with the Galadriel tribe as well as having helped Elizabeth and Vyvyan all this time, I have never had them plead me like this before. This is the second time you are pleading me like this. Well, whatever. I'll make a trip with you to the desert out of consideration for your two mothers and your sincerity."

"Thank you so much!"

"It's nothing, it's nothing. My work is really interesting too. Haven't I always been wiping your family's ass?" She laughed cheerfully. But then she quickly switched to a stern expression and said, "But your majesty, you must remember that the desert is different to this place. The natural climate and environment there is harsh. Your status as a prince isn't even worth a bottle of water there. It's an extremely dangerous place. You must remember to bring your guard-unit along and they must be fully-equipped. If you insist on going, you must be mentally prepared for your guard-unit to suffer sacrifices."

I nodded and replied: "I understand. I trust them!"

The red-haired lady nodded and responded: "Good then. I shall prepare then, your majesty. Just let me know when it's time to set out. Your majesty, you have lofty ambitions just like Inard did back then. That was the first time I saw an elf take the initiative to interact with humans. At the time, I believed that they would meet a tragic ending, but it doesn't look like that's the case now. So while I think that you are being rash, it might be a good thing. I shall give my all to assist you. However, I want to play with those metals....."

“All right!”

Well, the matter with Lorana looks like it's been settled. I managed to persuade her who was most suited for this job. If you want to go to the desert, you really do need a suitable candidate. I did say that the people by my side who I could rely on and could help me couldn't walk by my side this time. So I can only rely on myself no matter what happens this time.

Ah, and Lorana.

I returned to the palace and bumped into a frantic Luna.

“Luna!”

Luna looked at me and excitedly called out to me: “Your majesty!”

I noticed her hasty expression so I smiled and asked: “What’s wrong? What are you in such a rush for? Did something happen in the palace?”

She nodded furiously. She looked like she couldn’t hold back her smile. She looked at me, and in a serious and excited tone informed me: “Did you know?! Did you know?! Miss Nier was sent back here because she was not feeling too well. After the doctor saw her, we found out she is pregnant! Miss Nier is pregnant!”

## Ch. 03

I hugged Nier who was curled up in my embrace crying due to overjoy. I stroked her head and back while she gripped my clothes tightly. In my arms, she excitedly murmured: "My child..... My child with his majesty..... My child with his majesty..... Finally..... We finally have a child..... Your child....."

I stroked her back as I nodded with a smile. I said: "That's right, that's right, Nier, our child. This is our child. I told you didn't I? I told you we'd definitely have a child."

"Uhm! Uhm! Our child. Our child..... Your majesty, this is our child....."

Nier hugged me tightly, wiped the tears at the corners of her eyes, looked up and kissed my lips with excitement. We kissed each other passionately. I was a lot more excited about Nier's pregnancy than Lucia's because it was harder for Nier to get pregnant. Further, descendants had more meaning for humans. News that Nier was pregnant virtually shocked everyone in the palace.

Even the empress was so excited her hands shook, not knowing what she should do. I could only pray that mom wouldn't make Nier that soup. She'll die. And it'll be one corpse but two lives.

Nier released me and then wiped the corners of her mouth. She looked at me with puppy-eyes and softly asked: "Dear... are you going to the desert? I heard it from Freya. You wanted to go to the desert to find something, right? I don't really know what you're doing... but... do you have to leave?"

I shook my head and hugged her tighter. I replied: "No, I'm not going anywhere anymore. I'm not going to the desert anymore. I'll stay by your side. I'm just going to stay with you and our child."

Those were honest words. Nier wasn't pregnant yet when I was starting to get ambitious. I know that Nier can look after herself, plus she has the empress and Freya, so I could leave her here and head to the desert alone. But, not now. She's pregnant now. She's carrying our child so I can't let Nier stay here alone with our child, and there's no way I can drag her along with me. I need to stay by her side. They are my most cherished treasures.

I never even had a girlfriend, but I was now a father. How could I ditch my wife and child? A man's ambition is flimsy in front of his family. A man feels more accomplished if he can put a smile on his family's face than being way out somewhere in the world. Put another way, a man's career pursuits are just for the sake of giving his family a better living standard and home.

I don't want to go. I just want to stay by Nier's side. Socina whatever and whatever metal-mabob, don't matter. They can't make me as happy as Nier's smile. I just want to stay here with her. I don't want to unite the continent or accomplish some great feat. My greatest accomplishment would be having Nier by my side with a smile and watching my child grow up.

Nier grabbed my arm firmly and then shook her head. She clarified: "No... that's not what I meant, dear. I was just apologising to you..... I may not be able to protect you now. If you want to go to the desert, I can't protect you at your side. I don't want to be running around because I have a child now."

"Nier....."

I then paused to look at her and spaced out. Nier looked up at me with a smile. She reached her hands out to clasp my face and with a smile said: "My world used to be a tiny one at her majesty's side. That was my everything. I once thought that that was the entire world. I never thought the world would be this large and this wonderful. You were the one who let me see this vast world. You were the one who let me experience countless moments of bliss and new things. You were the one who gave me the entire world... so I don't want your world to end here because of me."

Nier then gently leaned her head on my chest and softly continued: "It's all right. I have her majesty with me as well as Freya. I'll be fine. Go to the desert without any worries, my dear. I don't really understand what you are trying to do, but I know that it must be something that will be useful. I want to be of use to you, not a burden to you. Don't worry about me. You are the prince, so please go and do what a prince should do. However, you must promise me... you must promise me... you must... return to my side alive....."

"Nier!"

I was so moved I couldn't hold myself back any more and I hugged Nier

tightly. This girl who was once cold as ice and tough as iron leaned into my arms. I hugged her tightly. I was choking to the point I couldn't utter a word. I really admire the hell out of myself. I'm so fortunate to have her as my wife. She was the one I loved most.

"I promise, Nier. I promise I'll come back alive for sure. The same goes for you, Nier. You must look after yourself. You must. Let the other Valkyries take over the training supervision. You just focus on looking after yourself. Don't partake in any strenuous work and don't put yourself in danger."

I hugged her tightly and kissed her forehead. Elizabeth then knocked on the door and pulled the door open. She smiled as she looked at us and asked: "How nice, how nice, son. You've got a child now, son..... Mommy... mommy is trying to come up with a name..... Which one do you like, son?"

"Mom... our child still hasn't been born yet....."

"Hmm..... I actually came up with your name, Troy. It's a combination of the elven language and humanity's language. It means 'brave and kind person'. Naming is important. See, look at you. Doesn't that describe you perfectly? You're brave and kind. What about our child? Our child... Ah, sorry, I meant, your child with Nier. What will your child be like?"

Did you just say something you shouldn't have in a moment of excitement?! Did you just make a mistake?! Did you just say "our child"?! Did you just say something you shouldn't have?! I believe that we have never done anything of the sort! There's no way!

Nier giggled and remarked: "We still do not know our child's gender, so we cannot name our child yet, your majesty. However, I believe that if it is a boy then he will definitely be a great man like his majesty. If our child is a girl, then she will be as noble and great as you, your majesty."

"Uhm, uhm, you're right, you're right. That's how it'll be. That's how it'll be." Elizabeth rubbed her hands together excitedly. She then looked at Nier and told her: "I have already arranged for two active Valkyries to guard you, I've ordered maids and experts in taking care of maternal mothers from the royal capital to come here as well as the best chef. There will be no problems. You'll be fine for sure. But you must look after yourself. You must bring seven Valkyries and three

maids with you no matter where you go. You must take care of yourself!"

I was a little stunned. That's too much, don't you think?! This makes me feel like there will be a problem.....

"Uhm! There will definitely be no problems!"

How come Nier has become so obedient all of a sudden?!

"Mom, do you have time right now?"

I looked at mom as I patted Nier on her head. I then stood up and looked at mom.

Elizabeth nodded and replied: "Yes, I do. I definitely have time. Is something up?"

"Uhm, yes there is, mom. Let's step outside and talk."

"All right."

## Ch. 04

Elizabeth got worked up and got up from her chair. Shocked, she exclaimed: “What?! You want to go to the desert now?! Son, you’re a father now! You want to leave now?! You’re going to leave Nier with me and go? Nier won’t say anything but she is definitely hoping for you to stay. Think about your child and your wife!”

I nodded and replied: “I know. Of course I know that. But I have no choice. I don’t want to give up on this matter either. Plus, Nier will be with you. I trust you. You will definitely look after Nier wholeheartedly. I’ve also seen how meticulous you were with Nier’s arrangements so I don’t have to worry, which is why I can go without a worry.”

Elizabeth looked at me with a slightly complex gaze. She then sighed and said: “It’s not like that, son. Of course you trust me. You’re my son after all. Nier is also the child I like the most so there definitely won’t be a problem. However, that’s not how you’re supposed to think about this.”

Elizabeth looked irritated. She put one leg over the other and rubbed her temples looking extremely irritated. She sighed with an upset and wronged look. I’ve never seen Elizabeth look like that. Her gaze looked particularly complex. She looked like she was wronged and she was suffering like her husband left her. It was like the one that was actually upset was her and not Nier.

I looked at mom and said: “Why? What’s the problem? Nier said she didn’t have an issue with it either. I think that Nier can take care of herself. I don’t want to let this opportunity go to waste for nothing either.....”

“Because this is about love!”

Elizabeth tapped on the table and looked at me with a hint of anger. She raised her voice a fair bit: “Son, you can’t think like that. You have to know that to Nier, you are her husband as well as your child’s father. Nier’s identity as the princess won’t allow her to stop you, but you’re her husband! You’re her love! A woman doesn’t want anything when she’s pregnant. She doesn’t want a

Valkyrie or some maid, but you!"

"Nier....."

Elizabeth slammed her hand on the table hard and then looked at me furiously. She exclaimed: "Nier is a Valkyrie and your princess! She won't stop you because of this but she's also a woman, don't you know that?! No, you don't! But I understand it! I'm a woman! I get it! You're the same as your father. Do you still not get it?! Do you not know what I want?! I dreamt of your father a few days ago. I dreamt of my husband. Do you know what a woman wants?! She wants her family!"

She looked at me with her eyes full of tears. Her voice sounded somewhat hoarse as she spoke: "What will Nier think if you go and leave your wife behind? Would Nier be able to raise your child in peace? Would she be able to take care of her child in peace? Won't she miss you? You think you're the only one who misses her? She'll miss you! She'll miss you! You want her to live here in peace because of your problem? What after? And then you'll go to the north and go missing and have just your ring return?! What do you want Nier to do?! What do you want Nier to do?!"

I was speechless. What Lorana said rang in my ear. No one's fate is safe in the desert. Even Lorana mentioned that it was dangerous. She's the strongest sword saint on the continent and even she said there was danger, so I'll be at risk too. It's not as dangerous as the dragons up north, but I don't think I'm as powerful as my father either.

This was a repeat of Elizabeth's past. Elizabeth understood the feeling. History was repeating itself. In the end, she didn't get to see her husband one last time. Her husband left just like that. Only a ring came back and it wasn't even with her. She only had his sword and cape.

She felt that history was being repeated. She felt the same fate would befall us again. She wasn't being wilful or stopping me. She saw Nier as another her right now. That's why Elizabeth is stopping me right now. Elizabeth was worried about Nier right now.

"You are the prince, and you should deal with this matter. If you hadn't gotten married yet, and if Nier hadn't gotten pregnant yet, I don't care where

you go. Nier would be able to accompany you to the desert too. I would be very assured with the Valkyries' sword instructor accompanying you, but what about now? You're now Nier's husband. You're the father of the child Nier is carrying. What you're doing is too dangerous! Nier can't accompany you too, so how do you expect me to feel assured letting you go? Who else could you bring along that would put me at ease? Freya or Luna? Lucia has already gone to the elven side, so who else left do you have? Mommy has already experienced it once, and there's no way mommy is going to let Nier go through that same experience even once. Not happening! She's not the only one worried about you, there's mommy too! Mommy is worried about you!"

I looked at Elizabeth silently without saying anything. I had no argument for what Elizabeth said. I was indecisive about it to begin with. Now it's even more impossible for me to make my decision.

How do I protect Nier? But I don't want to just do nothing like this. I agreed on this with the Lorana. This is also the most crucial matter I need to take care of as the lord of this city. Plus, this is the first large job of this scale I'm carrying out since coming here. I don't want to give up this opportunity just like this.

Of course I won't abandon Nier. If Nier needs me, I'll give up on it without any hesitation. I'll let go of everything without hesitation just like I hugged her before if she needs me. But... but Nier already said I could go. If I stay, Nier will feel guilty for sure, won't she? But as Elizabeth pointed out, Nier definitely wants for me to stay to.

"In any case, you no longer are who you were before. Son, you've gotten married, but your thinking hasn't changed at all. Mommy is very disappointed with your rashness this time."

Elizabeth let out a heavy sigh like she had just aged several decades. She stood up and walked to the door. She then softly said: "Son, you're a husband and a father now. You can't just think about yourself anymore. You need to think about your family as well. Don't copy your father. You need to understand that it's not just your life alone as countless others are also worried for you."

"I understand."

I lowered my head and let out a heavy sigh.

Elizabeth turned her head around, looked at me with a complex expression and said: "Don't rush this matter too much. Think carefully and then you can decide what you do. Son, grow up a little. Care about the people around you. You are becoming more and more like your father. But don't copy your father. Your father was also forced to. He had no choice, but no one is forcing you now so don't do something that would let your family down. You have a family. Do not. Do not neglect your family as you pursue your career. Your family is your real treasure."

## Ch. 05

“Onii-sama, what do you need to include in your luggage for your trip to the desert? I have prepared your basic necessities. As for your escort and guards’ preparations, I require your confirmation.”

I took the document Freya handed me and pressed it down onto the table before sighing heavily. Freya looked at me, smiled and said: “Onii-sama, could it be that you do not bear to leave? That is normal. Men always let go of lots of things when they have a wife.”

I rubbed my temples, a habit which I picked up from Elizabeth. I sat off-centre on my chair and replied: “Yeah. I really don’t know what I should do. Both mom and Nier don’t really want for me to go, do they?”

“No. You should not say that. You should say that the princess, your majesty has already prepared for your journey. She has packed your luggage, despite it being just your clothes. But that goes to show that she supports you going to the desert. You are blessed to have such an understanding wife.”

Freya smiled as she looked at me and I looked at her smile and eyes. I still don’t know what emotion her eyes are giving off and what she’s thinking. She’s just a child and yet she possesses such deep and profound thoughts. She noticed my gaze on her so she giggled softly and asked: “Onii-sama, are you concerned about my opinion?”

I nodded as I looked at her and responded: “Uhm. I depend on you lots, Freya, since I’ve always seen you as my sister. I should get my family together to think about this to be fair. So Freya, what do you think about what I want to do?”

She nodded and thought to herself for a moment. She then answered: “That is a very interesting question, onii-sama. Before I answer you, please allow me to preface my answer. Onii-sama, you should be aware that the answer given for the same question will differ depending on one’s identity. So now I am wondering which identity I should answer you as.”

I looked at her with curiosity and said: “Give me your answer from all your perspectives then.”

“Alright, your majesty.” She emphasised the two words “your majesty”. She then answered: “As the proxy of Troy City and as your advisor, Freya believes that it is absolutely vital that you make this trip. It would be best if you can locate the metal. Even if you do not, presenting yourself to the five nations in the desert would not be a bad decision. It is a good move no matter how you look at it.”

I nodded. I understand that. I’ve never seen the five nations of the desert. I’ve only drank their wine. I have to make a trip to these surrounding vassal states to announce myself and to let them know who they should pay tribute to, since I’m the next emperor

“And?”

Freya took in a big breath and then in a slightly hoarse voice said: “Onii-chan... onii-chan... please... don’t go... don’t go..... You could live well and happily here, so why must you put yourself in danger.....? Why do you want to go to such a dangerous place? Even if you disregard this sister of yours, you should consider my sisters-in-law and their children..... That.”

Freya then stopped with her wronged and upset voice, and swapped it out for her usual voice. She looked at me and grinned with excitement like she just put on a perfect performance. I looked at her seemingly recite her lines in one breath. I thought it was Freya’s true personality, only to see her perfect sarcastic smile which brought me back to my senses with her usual voice.

There won’t be any bro-cons or sis-cons here in this world..... You can’t be a sis-con for a sister like this! Moms are better. Mom is the best in the world. Nursery rhymes didn’t lie to me.

“That’s it. As your vassal, I naturally hope that you can personally make a trip there. But as your family, I naturally don’t want to let you go somewhere so dangerous.”

Freya then spoke in a serious tone: “The desert is extremely dangerous. Both sandstorms and the bandits there are extremely frightening. Further, we are not certain we can find that mine. If you cannot find it, then we would have gone there for nothing. There is no sister that would be willing to see her brother go to such a dangerous place, right? Moreover, you are not bringing

me, your sister along.”

“Nothing I can do about that. The only one I have around me that I can trust to look after the city is you.” I smiled helplessly and asked, “Freya, do you still not really want for me to go?”

“Did I not already tell you? My answer will differ depending on the perspective I answer you from. If you see me as your vassal, I would fully support your journey to the desert. If you do not want to leave your sister as her brother, then you can stay and we can continue living peacefully. Our princess has moved into the room next to her majesty’s as well due to her pregnancy. So who knows, you might not be able to resist your urges and do something to me too to make me happy.....”

Hey, hey, hey, did you just say something very, very scary?! Did you just suggest a crazy idea? Have you been watching me for a long time?! I don’t have the balls to commit incest. If they find out, they’ll “duel” you!

Heck, they might even drag me into it. Though Lucia is in a very good mood at the moment, I think that accepting Nier alone is the maximum she will accept. If I have a third woman, she probably really will skewer me with a sword.....

I ignored the last section of what Freya said. I then looked at her and said: “I understand now. Freya, are you saying that you want to come with me?”

Freya paused for a moment and then straightened up her posture like her emotions exploded. She looked at me angrily and thundered: “Have you only just realised that, onii-sama?! Of course I want to go with you! You are my onii-sama! I still need you to help me realise my future, so how can I let you die in the desert?! How can I let you die in the desert?! I do not mind you going, but at least bring me with you! I will definitely keep you safe! What do you expect me to do by leaving me here.....? Ah!!”

I jumped up and pulled her into my embrace. Freya froze up and resisted for a moment before settling down and relaxing onto my chest.

She didn’t bring her arms up to hug me. She let me hug her and didn’t say a word.

I didn’t say anything either. I just gently stroked her head like combing a cat’s

fur.

A moment after, Freya raised her head up, let out a sigh of relief and softly said: "Sorry, onii-sama. I got a little too worked up..... I just feel that I have become a little odd recently..... I think it was around when we arrived here and began leading a steady lifestyle..... I was glad to see you slowly grow stronger in the past, but I am now used to having you by my side. A life without you causes me to panic and I cannot calm down..... So... I do not really want for you to leave... but... but... I cannot hold you back from moving forwards because of that because I do not have the right to..... I am not your sister. I always knew that..... I want you to stay by my side..... But I do not even have the right to....."

"Stop it. You're my sister. My only sister."

I hugged her tightly and cut her off. After a moment of silence, I took in a deep breath and told her: "Let me deliberate it some more. But help me make preparations to leave first, Freya....."

"..... Understood, onii-sama."

## Ch. 06

“So that’s what you called me for. I thought you called for me for something really important. You scared mommy to death. Before mommy answers you, you have to compensate mommy’s loss.”

Vyvyan coming over was a little problematic as I expected..... Vyvyan wedged my head in between her valleys of bliss and affectionately rubbed me while moaning like she was getting addicted to the feeling. With my head buried in between her valleys, her fragrant scent blocked my nose so I struggled to get oxygen. But I can’t do anything right now as I need mom to help me come up with an idea.....

She released me after a while. She then hooked her arms behind my legs and then princess-carried me. She sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked my head as she asked: “Ah..... I’ve finished replenishing my son-energy. Alright, son, tell me what you think.”

Looking upward from my position, all I could see was two mounds that looked like they were going to crash down and squash me.....

I told her about it and she listened to me with a smile. Seriously, those two round mounds looked like they were going to crush my head at any moment so I didn’t even know what I was saying.

Vyvyan patiently listened to everything I had to say. She then stroked my head and answered: “Stay, son. There is no need for you to go to a dangerous place. If you are worried about the metal, we can provide you with enough of it from our side. Your human guard-unit aside, your Earth Dragon cavalry unit’s weapons have already been updated so there is no need for you to go to the desert. Shouldn’t you just stay here and fulfil your role as a husband and father?”

I looked at Vyvyan’s gaze. It felt pointless to ask Vyvyan. Vyvyan would never let me go somewhere dangerous. If I said the desert was dangerous then she might just use force to keep me here. However, Vyvyan is my mother at the end of the day so it was best that I asked for her opinion.

I would at least need to notify her or she'd go berserk when I come back.

"But... mom... I don't want to do nothing..... I love my wives, but..... but... I don't want to remain under your protection forever. I think that I can protect my wives and children with my own strength now....."

Before I could finish my sentence, a vine wrapped itself around my legs and suspended me upside down in the air. Before I could scream, a cold breeze surrounded me. The tip of an ice-pick appeared right in front of my eyes. It felt like it would stab into my eye if I so much as budged. It was like I was being watched by an iron maiden. I was surrounded by ice-picks with the tips pointed toward me only millimetres away from me.

The cold air and the air of death caused me to freeze up. Vyvyan stood close by. Her voice was ethereal like it didn't exist: "Son, do you still think that you can protect your wives and children? Do you still think that you can protect yourself properly? Son, you have never been trained for battle. You haven't even learnt the proper way to hold a sword. What makes you think that you can protect those around you? Growing older doesn't mean that you become more capable."

The ice-picks around me vanished in an instant. All that was left was the vine restraining my legs hanging me upside down. Being hung upside down like this makes me feel like I'm going to puke because all my blood has rushed to my head. Vyvyan stood to the side with her arms folded. In a slightly angry tone she said: "Can you come down without mommy's help? Just a vine alone is able to trap you to death. Son, how do you expect people to not worry when you're like this? You want to show that you're different and you're competent, but you need strength for that!"

The vine put me on the ground. I crawled along the ground and gasped for air. Vyvyan walked up to me and hugged me because it caused her heart to ache. She gently stroked my head and gently said: "Don't blame mommy. Mommy doesn't think that you're weak the way you are. Mommy doesn't think that you're no good like this either. Mommy actually likes you like this. You just need to remain in mommy's arms. That's not embarrassing, son. Nobody in this world is capable of doing everything. Mommy is your resource. You can use mommy whenever you want. Mommy will do anything for you, so there's no need for

you to go somewhere so far. Mommy will give you anything as long as you can stay by mommy's side."

Vyvyan carefully stroked me as she hummed a tune softly as if she was calming down her child that got frightened. I leaned into Vyvyan's arms and felt bitter but I couldn't say it. Vyvyan wasn't wrong. I was still the same even though I thought I'd changed. I thought I'd grown sturdy wings for myself, but in actuality, I haven't changed at all.

I was having ridiculous ideas about going into the desert when I couldn't even undo a vine around my legs.

"If you need metal, mommy will give us elves' metal. There's no need for you to go to that faraway place. Mommy can't guarantee that you'll be completely fine even if mommy can reach you any time. Mommy can't let you leave mommy's sight when you want to go to such a dangerous place. You're safe here so stay here. This is your home. This is your throne in the future. There's no need for you to go to dangerous places."

Vyvyan released me, massaged my ankle and then added: "Listen to mommy. Don't go to such a dangerous place."

I knew Vyvyan's answer. Her answer was pretty much the same as Elizabeth. However, Elizabeth's response was more motivated by the upsetting feeling that she didn't get to see Inard one last time, so she didn't want to let me leave. Vyvyan who has always doted on me was even less likely to let me leave. Although Nier supported me, she was the same as Freya. They didn't want to let me leave.

Nobody around me approved of me going. Perhaps my idea was too impulsive and didn't take the people around me into consideration.

But... but... I understand what they mean. I understand their love for me. I get that they were thinking for my best interests.....

But... but..... but I have my own plans too. I know I should understand them and I am indeed their husband and their children's father. But... but.... I'm a prince too. I'm also the elf-prince. A life where I let my mom's protect me by my side forever is... is.....

Is that the life I want?

How am I going to answer to Mera...? Am I supposed to just let her die like that? Mera wanted for me to become a qualified king. But is a qualified king meant to always stay by his moms' side?

What do I do? What do I do?

After a while, I softly spoke: "Mom....."

Vyvyan touched my forehead and gently asked: "What is it?"

"I want to know if I can go to the elves' side?"

"You should be able to stay for a while now..... But you still can't stay for that long. What's wrong?"

"I want to go and see Lucia..... I really want to see my Lucia right now..... Right now....."

I started choking on my words for some reason. Why do I particularly want to see Lucia now?

## Ch. 07

“Princess, please be careful. Be careful not to trip! You will trip if you do this! Oh my god!! That is dangerous!! Guards!! Guards! Hurry and put something soft underneath for cushioning! Hurry!”

“I won’t!”

Lucia grouchily looked at the maid behind her who looked like she was going to explode. She pulled back half of her body she had extended out. In her hand was a flower she had just picked. She said: “You are my mother’s friend so you do not need to call me ‘princess’. Can’t you just continue calling me ‘Lucia’.....? Ah, you don’t have to do that, guards! Go back. I was just picking a flower.”

Lucia rubbed her belly that was still flat and then looked at the flower in her hand nostalgically. Her gaze was full of nostalgia and tenderness. She asked: “His highness gave me this sort of flower every year. Hehe, and these flowers would bloom. His highness used to be the one who used to pluck them for me..... Wait!!”

Lucia’s gaze fixated itself outside the window. She looked at the two walking over outside. One of them was dressed in blue and the other in green. She looked at the silhouette with her gaze brimming with surprise. She looked at the two silhouettes blankly. She looked in their direction with utter surprise. She watched their two silhouettes slowly come toward her direction.....

Lucia looked blankly in their direction and murmured: “Your highness.....”

“What?! His highness?! His... Ah!! Princess!! Do not be so impulsive!! Don’t run! Don’t run so fast! Don’t trip over! Don’t trip! Guards! Guards!!”

I caught Lucia who leapt at me and hugged her tightly. She leaned on my shoulder and wept silently. She hugged me tightly and didn’t speak for a long while. I hugged her tightly as well while I sincerely stroked her back. I rarely get to see Lucia. Lucia returned to the elven side after she got pregnant while I couldn’t come here. But I miss her now. I really miss her and really want to see her.

After a while, she bit my ear and softly asked: "Your highness... can you manage?"

"I'm fine. I'm fine. What about you? Lucia, are you well? I saw you run so quickly. Are you all right?"

"I'll be fine. I'll surely be fine since I'm your wife after all!" Lucia hugged me tightly as she seriously and determinedly continued, "I'm fine, your highness. I'll definitely be fine even if I'm not by your side, but... but... but... but I still hope that I get to see you... I want to see you more and be able to stay by your side forever....."

"I know. I know."

I nodded. While still hugging her tightly, I kissed her neck and she responded by moaning sexily. She then took a small step back, cupped my face and gave me a serious kiss. Lucia's kisses were still immature. However, that was Lucia's love. It was her immature and yet serious love for me. This is the love my most beloved Lucia gave me.

I love Lucia. That will never change. Ever. The first person I thought of when I was stuck was Lucia. I want to let Lucia help me come up with an idea. She was now the last person I had to ask.

"Lucia. Lucia, I want to ask you about something."

"Uhm, ask, your highness."

Lucia then looked at me and thought to herself for a moment before continuing, "Your highness, I believe that you must have important business to go so far. I'm guessing that you want to do something dangerous and came to see me because you were worried about me, am I correct?"

I froze up and looked at her blankly. I then responded: "How did you know so much? Did you guess that?"

Lucia giggled and replied: "Yes. Your highness, I know you too well. You always like chasing danger. But this time, I believed that you would definitely come to ask for my opinion because you are my husband. You are our child's father. I believe that you will surely come and ask me for my opinion when you want to do something now."

I looked at Lucia, nodded and said: "You're right, Lucia. That's what I wanted to ask you....."

I told Lucia about it. Lucia looked at my eyes earnestly. She waited for me to finish without changing her expression. Once I was done speaking, she pinched the flower in her hand and went silent for a moment before giving a response: "Your highness, is it dangerous in the desert?"

"Uhm. It should be very dangerous."

"Do you want to go then?"

"I don't know....."

"No, I believe that you do know." Lucia cut me off. She looked into my eyes and grumbled: "Your highness, you always immediately went and did what you wanted. You never got hung up on these sorts of questions. Your highness, I should be helpful to you, not chaining you down. If you want to go and do it, go and do it. Don't worry about me here, your highness. We just need to love each other. I know you love me and I will love you always. I believe that we will surely be together after we separate. Your highness, go and do what you want to do!"

"But... but it's dangerous....."

"You can definitely overcome it! I know that it must be dangerous, but it was dangerous when you faced the Earth Dragons too. I can't be by your side this time, but I have faith in you and your abilities. Your highness, you are definitely not weak. You are actually incomparably strong! Your courage and heart is incomparably strong! That's why you have us! You are not weak since power doesn't pertain to just one's abilities but also includes those around them!"

Lucia looked at me with an earnest look. She then took in a deep breath and went on: "Your highness, go and do what it is you want to do. Don't stop because of us. I will definitely support you from behind. I want to see you become stronger and stronger. I want to watch you continue down your path! You must become a great king, not a child! Just as when we faced the Earth Dragons, I want you to resolve the matter!"

"Lucia....."

I looked at Lucia blankly. She looked at me with a serious look and said: "I'll be fine! Your highness, you don't have to worry about me! I will look after myself well! You must look after yourself too. I trust that her highness won't get in your way too much either, right? You just need to express your thoughts and you will have everyone's support! Please walk your own path, your highness! You are the next king!"

I looked at her, nodded sincerely, hugged her and tenderly said: "I understand now. I'll be sure to look after myself. I'll definitely make it back alive. I won't leave you all behind. I'll be back for sure."

"Uhm....." Lucia leaned onto my chest weakly and gripped my clothes tightly. She resolutely and at the same time, sadly said: "If you don't come back..... I will raise our child and come to meet you after. You must know that if something were to befall you, I will definitely go find you. I definitely will....."

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Current time at the temporary Valkyrie headquarters.

Alice silently poured him a cup of wine. After a moment of silence, she remarked: "Nier is pregnant."

Castell nodded and replied: "I know. Virtually the entire palace is revolving around her now that she's pregnant. It's like a parade whenever she goes somewhere, so there's no way I wouldn't know."

"That means that the purpose of his majesty's existence is gone."

Alice placed her cup of wine down and looked at Castell seriously. She indifferently elaborated: "He... can die now....."

## Ch. 08

“Castell.”

“Do you have orders, your majesty?”

Castell placed the sleep-aid medication next to Elizabeth. Elizabeth took off her outer-wear and wore on her sexy sleepwear in front of him without a care. Faced with a milf with excess sexiness, Castell’s heart literally jumped out of his chest. He answered her with his head down to avoid seeing her perfect body.

The empress didn’t care about his gaze though. She got into her blanket and then let out a soothed sigh. She picked up the medication and finished it in one shot. She then shut her eyes and said: “On the bookshelf is a letter addressed to the leaders of the five nations of the desert as well as my orders for our army stationed in the desert. Have someone send it there as fast as possible. Ask them to help his majesty when he gets there in any way they can. Any actions against his majesty are to be treated as treason against the nation.”

Castell picked up a stack of envelopes. He then looked at the empress and asked with surprise: “His majesty is going to the desert? When was this decided?”

“It hasn’t really been decided yet. It’s just his own idea.”

“I do not think that there is any need for his majesty to go to the desert. Not only is it dangerous there, there is nothing worth the royal family personally going there for! There is absolutely no need for his majesty to go there if he needs something from there. Even if an order is passed down, the royal capital is too far away to have a significant influence on them so his majesty will meet with great risk.”

“Oh?”

Elizabeth smiled and opened her eyes.. She turned onto her side. She revealed one arm to pull her blanket. She wore a playful smile to look at Castell and asked: “How rare, Castell. When it came to matters involving my son, wasn’t it always the case that you’d do what I ordered? Why have you suddenly

started considering my son's safety this time?"

Castell froze up and then went down on one knee. He replied: "You need not worry, your majesty, my loyalty belongs to you alone. Toward his majesty, I....."

Elizabeth impatiently cut him off: "You don't have to say that. If you aren't loyal to my son, I'll be first in line to take your head. My son is everything to me. If you are loyal to me, you must be loyal to my son. I think it's good for you to assist my son. You don't have to worry about me having misgivings. As I mentioned, if my son wants the throne, I will hand it to him without hesitation. If my head could put a smile to his face, I won't hesitate to give him my head either!"

Castell looked at the empress and firmly said: "You must not say that, your majesty! His majesty does not have what it takes to run a nation at current. If you pass the crown to him without thinking it through, you will cause the downfall of this nation."

"Isn't that why he doesn't covet the throne?" She cut him off again with annoyance. She then went on: "What I meant was for you to do everything you can to keep him safe. Though I'm letting him decide if he goes or not this time, I reckon he will definitely go. I know him. I know that he's the same as my husband. Not going because it's dangerous isn't his character. I have no way of rejecting his wish. I can't do something that would make him unhappy. That's why I can only help him as much as I can discreetly."

After a moment of silence, Castell nodded and responded: "..... I understand now. Your majesty, I shall ask the five nations of the desert to assist, but that is all I can do. The five nations of the desert are too far away from us. We cannot directly send an army there either. His majesty must take care of himself."

"That's fine. If he has the courage to go, he must have what it takes too. Further, I have examined his guard-unit once. They follow orders to a T and are very much like elites. They might not be as loyal and skilled as the Valkyries, but I believe that his guard-unit will be able to mow down all resistance they meet."

Elizabeth wore an expression of immense pride when she mentioned her son's guard-unit. Castell on the other hand was a little worried though. The guns his majesty's guard-unit possessed were created without blueprints from

her majesty, and their sword skills were taught to them by a Valkyrie. His army was basically his majesty's private weapon. Under normal circumstances, the empress would surely be concerned since such a powerful army was right under her nose. But not only was she not concerned, she was to the contrary, proud. She wouldn't hesitate to provide them with even better resources.

Is that a mother's love? Her majesty wouldn't even notice if his majesty intended to revolt, would she...? Her majesty was an extremely vigilant individual, yet she allowed such a powerful force to exist right next to her. Does motherly love make one oblivious and neglectful too? Before he is her son, he's also someone vying for the throne.

Has her majesty forgotten that?

"I can only do this much for my son. He must come back safely."

Elizabeth sighed and then closed her eyes. It looked like the medication was kicking in. Castell lingered and then asked her a question with the intent of seeing what her response would be: "Your majesty, I heard a rumour. But it did come from places like bars, so I have no proof to back up its authenticity..... It is said that someone is plotting against his majesty....."

"Oh?"

She had closed her eyes but she opened them instantly like an eagle's eye aiming down at its prey, like she suddenly drew her sword and stabbed it through Castell's heart. Castell shuddered like her killing intent slashed him to pieces. The atmosphere went dead silent in an instant. The empress's domineering aura oppressed everything in the air. Castell's knees quivered like he couldn't withstand her dominance and was forced to his knees.

That is the empress' anger. That is a sovereign's dominance.

".....Whatever."

After pondering it for a moment, the empress closed her eyes again and the air relaxed once again, and Castell let out a long sigh. Those few seconds just now felt like centuries. Castell almost forgot to breathe. The empress continued, "I don't believe there is anyone who can hurt my son in my presence. Even if they do, my Valkyries will just cut them up. Frankly, I'm bored

of this long peace. I wish there was a group who wasn't afraid of death so I could let my blade drink blood."

Castell didn't respond. He just tried telling the empress about Alice's plans. But it didn't look like the empress suspected her personal guards. In other words, Alice had never expressed her true thoughts to the empress. It looks like Alice is aware of the empress's feelings for his majesty. She's aware that it's pointless to try and persuade her, so she decided to get rid of his majesty discreetly.

Castell doesn't have any feelings toward his majesty. He doesn't hate or like him just like his attitude for others. However, he refused to help Alice. He only promised to keep her secret, not for his majesty's sake but for the empress.

The empress will surely be sad if his majesty dies.

He just didn't want to let her majesty be sad.

That was the reason he tried to hint it to her majesty, but it didn't seem like she really cared. She had never suspected her Valkyries..... Perhaps she saw the Valkyries as tools. And tools don't have thoughts.

But how else could he say it? He couldn't tell her straight up..... He could only do everything in his power to ruin Alice's plan and reveal her plot.

Castell shut the door gently. With his back facing the large white door to her majesty's room, he let out a heavy sigh.

## Ch. 09

“Ss!”

Nier hissed in cold air as she looked at the blood coming out of her hand after she pricked it. Luna placed the things in her hands down and grabbed Nier’s hand. Nier chuckled and said: “It’s nothing, Luna. I licked blood off my blade back then, so this is nothing.”

Luna looked at her, smiled helplessly and said: “Princess, this sort of protective talisman is a lie. It is useless. There is no need for you to waste time on it.”

Nier shook her head with a smile. She picked up the talisman and looked at it affectionately. She softly explained: “Her majesty made his majesty a scarf that he still wears now. I can’t be by his side to protect him this time so I’m worried. I’ll feel a little better if I give this to his majesty.”

“Princess, you need not worry about his majesty since he has not said that he will go.”

Nier shook her head then looked at Luna and replied with a smile: “He will. Do you still not know him well enough? When has he backed down due to danger? When I was his bodyguard, I really hated that habit of his..... But now that I think about it, he looked really suave at the time.”

Luna placed the talisman down and grinned shyly. However, she quickly realised that there was something wrong and quickly wiped her grin off her face. She stood up in a flustered fashion, made a small bow and said: “Princess, it is late now. You should rest. It is not good for you to sleep late. I shall not disturb your rest.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. I want to practice some more. I haven’t lined this part up yet.....”

“That will not do, princess. You cannot do that.” Luna sternly refused her and went on in a stern tone, “Your business is no longer your business alone but the entire palace’s business. I cannot be lax with things that have to do with you. If I

loosen my control on you then everyone in the palace will reprimand me. You need to rest for your child, and most importantly, there is still his majesty to consider. He definitely does not want to see you like this!"

Nier grumpily put the talisman in her hand down, lay down on her bed and pulled her blanket over herself. Luna watched Nier close her eyes. She then looked toward the fireplace and pulled out the firewood inside before tossing in another two new pieces of firewood. She then opened the window a little, closed the curtains properly and then blocked the fireplace with a black board. The room went dark. She looked toward Nier on the bed, made a small bow and said: "Goodnight, princess."

Nier responded with her eyes closed: "Goodnight, Luna."

Luna pulled open the door to her room and entered her room. Freya slept at the table with her face on top of recent finance books as well as reports from officials. Seeing the young Freya who was exhausted snoring gently in the room lighted up by a fire, Luna reached her hand out and gently stroked her head.

Luna viewed Freya as a good little sister. Freya always appeared full of confidence and smiled like a little devil in front of his majesty. Behind the scenes though, only she knew how exhausted she was. She frequently saw Freya sitting at the desk looking through documents when she had little awakenings at night.

Freya had to consider countless things, countless people, the power balance, countless different powers and profits in order to ensure that the ideas she provided his majesty with were correct. To her, only by doing all this could she help his majesty. She also usually spaced out while eating because she was constantly thinking.

Luna gently carried Freya to the bed and placed her down. She looked at Freya's small face and shook her head hopelessly. She sighed and then fell into her own thoughts as she looked into the darkness outside.

His majesty really isn't an ordinary individual. He's cheated so many girls with his innocent look. Most importantly, all of those women were absolutely loyal to him.

And she herself was one of them.

His majesty really is a player, huh?

She sat on the chair Freya was sitting on before. She picked up the talisman she was teaching Nier to weave before. She hadn't finished teaching Nier. She only taught her half of what she needed to know. She looked at the half-complete talisman and thought to herself for a moment. She then picked up the needle and thread to the side. Just as she went to continue it, she went and placed it back down.

She smiled and then realised something.

Nier and Lucia couldn't accompany his majesty this time and neither could Freya. None of them could accompany him this time. It's said that his majesty was going to go to the desert himself this time. But she knew that his majesty definitely wouldn't leave her behind because he needed her by his side on the full-moon night.

While the others couldn't stay by his majesty's side, she could. That realisation uplifted her mood a lot. She smiled and then placed her protective talisman down. She didn't need to give his majesty some sort of protective talisman because she herself was his majesty's protective talisman.

I looked at Lucia who was deep asleep next to me and stroked her small head. Then I looked at the moon outside and spaced out.

Anybody but Lucia may object to what I say. Perhaps it'd be more accurate to say that Lucia has always been the one to know what I was thinking. Maybe it was because we grew up together that she understood particularly well what I was thinking. She knows me best and is most understanding. That's why I really like Lucia.

But I know that this trip will be one fraught with danger. I don't know what will happen in the desert. Everybody has said that it's dangerous there.

"Son. Son....."

Just as I was about to lie down to sleep, there was a gentle knock at the door. Vyvyan poked her head in and waved at me. I sighed. I gently and carefully pulled my arm out from Lucia's grasp and then walked to the door.

As soon as I left the room, an arm yanked me to the side and pushed me up

against the wall. Before I could even sigh, my mouth was filled with a blissful scent.

When Vyvyan called me to come out, her eyes were blood-red so I knew that this would happen.

A domineering leg made its way in between my legs. I had no way of breaking free. Vyvyan greedily enveloped my entire mouth like she was trying to bite my tongue off. She kissed me wildly while rubbing one of her hands on my chest and the other grabbing my hand. It was like she wanted to touch every inch of my skin.

“Haaa... haa..... haa.....”

Vyvyan wiped her mouth and then bit me on my neck..... No, she wasn't doing to suck my blood this time. She did it purely because she wanted to leave a hickey! I wanted to push mom away but I noticed a shadow created by the fire at the corner of the wall. That meant that there was a guard there. If I made a sound now, what's happening between mom and I would be exposed.

And so, I could only keep my mouth shut tightly and not make a sound.

A moment after, Vyvyan looked up and gently stroked the bite-mark she left on my neck. She then looked into my eyes and seriously said: “Just as I always tell you. Son... you must remember not to make mommy worry. Remember that. Don't make mommy worry..... Don't put yourself in danger. If you run into danger, call for mommy. Mommy will definitely go to protect you. Mommy definitely will!”

## Ch. 10

“You are my onii-sama after all. I knew that you would definitely choose to go yourself.” Freya who was standing at my side chuckled softly and then said, “Onii-sama, what else do you need? Leave it with me.”

“Mm, let me have a think..... Honestly speaking, I don’t really know what I need for the desert. But it looks like I need lots of things. The list of things big sis gave me is here.”\*

I handed the list of items to Freya. She took a look at it and thought to herself for a while before responding: “You need a fair bit, huh? The desert really is incredible as I have heard. You are bringing your entire guard-unit with you this time too. I think you would need an entire escort to take everything. There are a lot of things to transport after all. There is water, food, tents, emergency items, weapons, ammunition... umm... let me see how many horses are needed.....”

I looked at Freya and said: “Send all these items to the city closest to the desert prior to us heading there. I have no need to lug these things around in the empire. Send them there first and I’ll just have to pick them up and head out when I get there. That includes the ammunition, weapons and necessities we need. We’ll stick with dried-meat and rye bread as staples for our food. We won’t take wine. We need to bring plenty of water since it’s the desert we’re talking about after all.”

“All right, but..... You need too many horses this time. It would be tough even with all of the horses in the palace right now.” Freya scratched her head. She sounded like she was in a dilemma as she continued, “You need horses for the riders as well as the horse carriages after all. That is not a small number of horses. You need at least seven or eight heavy horse-carriages this time. That means you need about fifty horses while there are only thirty horses in the palace. It would affect the people if we took their horses, would it not?”

I shook my head and replied: “There’s no need. We don’t need to take their horses. I’ll get a few Earth Dragons from mom. The tamed Earth Dragons are

our best tool. One Earth Dragon alone could pull a heavy horse-carriage. However, we need to design carriages that suit the Earth Dragons. Earth Dragons don't move slow either."

"That is a good idea. I shall go and ask the artisans to work on that now." Freya nodded with satisfaction and then asked: "Onii-sama, when do you plan to leave?"

I looked at the time and then answered: "In about a week's time since crafting the carriages for the Earth Dragons and preparing our required items takes time. I need to hurry since I will be weak on the full-moon night. If I run into a full-moon while I'm there fighting for the mine, I'll need to rest for some time."

Freya said: "Uhm. Onii-sama, you have to also bear in mind that the most important part after finding a mine is refinement. I sent messengers to the five nations of the desert under your name and received reports that the metal we are after is indeed a specialty in the southern parts of the desert. However, it's mainly produced at a few small villages spread out in the desert. The materials they manufacture are kept secret. But it is said that a small village had an accident recently. People are fighting over the book where they record the materials they manufacture in. However, the travellers of the desert are highly vigilant so I do not think it will be easy for you to locate them. Whatever the case, your task is to basically locate the mine and then find people who can refine the metal. After that, you need to decide for yourself if you want to bring them to the city here or let them stay there and just send you the amount you require annually."

I nodded and then said: "Freya, you must be careful here since you are managing an entire city and I won't be here. I reckon that people will make things difficult for you due to my absence. Do you want me to write a decree or pass an order down?"

Freya shook her head and replied: "There is no need, onii-sama. It would appear as though I am trying to seize power or getting them to do things for me in your name. I feel that there is no need to. The people in the city are well-behaved. I do not think they will try anything. The only thing that needs taking care of is helping the elves settle down and obtaining the crops for them to grow. I think everyone will support me on this matter."

“True. Who would get in their own way to wealth?”

I smiled and then scrubbed Freya’s head firmly and continued, “I’ll leave this city to you then, Freya. I trust you greatly. Don’t disappoint me.”

Freya rubbed my head back somewhat unhappily. She then looked at me and pouted: “You trust me that much and yet treat me like a kid? Only a kid would be happy with having her head scrubbed, right? That technique is useless on me, onii-sama.”

I looked at her and chuckled. I then asked: “What do you need then? Honey cherry tomatoes?”

“Am I worth only a mere honey cherry tomato to you, onii-sama?” She glared at me and then checked around her. She then put on mischievous smile, leaned in and wrapped her arm around mine. She then raised her chin up, closed her eyes slightly and said: “Do you not thank her highness and Miss Nier with a kiss? I want one too, onii-sama. Please kiss me with gratitude.”

When did you see that?! When did you see me and Vyvyan kiss?! When did you see us?! You saw something so important! Please don’t mention it in front of Elizabeth! Please don’t! Please! If you mention it, I’ll die!

“Freya!!”

“What’s wrong, onii-sama? Did I not say ‘please kiss me with gratitude’?” This is a kiss full of gratitude and trust. I am an adult too! It is not too much to ask for a kiss, is it?!” Freya closed her eyes and hugged my arm. She smiled mischievously and said, “Please hurry up, onii-sama. The place we are standing at right now is the place Miss Nier passes daily for her stroll.”

“And yet you’re making that sort of request here?!”

I looked at Freya utterly stunned. I honestly see Freya as my sister. I don’t have any other sorts of funny thoughts toward her. I don’t lust after her lips even when I’m looking at them right now. Although Freya is turning into a perfect lady, I still won’t lust after her.

“If you do not want to kiss me, I will tell Miss Nier about the kiss-mark on your neck.”

“How did you see it?! I’ve covered it up with my scarf already!!”

“But I saw it in the end..... Forget it. If you do not want to kiss me, then forget it.”

Freya pursed her lips and let me go unhappily. Before I could sigh a breath of relief however, Freya suddenly appeared in front of me and went up on her tippy-toes. I felt a gentle peck on my lips like a dragonfly brushing the water. I felt like an electric current ran through my entire body like I had a dream that came and went in a flash. It caused my body to shudder.

Freya then tapped her lips and stepped back. Before my senses returned to me, a voice came from my side...

“Dear?”

Frightened, I spun to my side and saw Nier who had just turned the corner. Nier looked at me with excitement and excitedly asked: “So you were here! Why didn’t you notify me?! What are you doing here?”

Freya chuckled softly and then waved the sheet of paper in her hand and explained: “Onii-sama and I were just discussing the things he needed for his journey to the desert, princess.”

Freya looked at me through the corner of her eye with a teasing aura. I looked at Nier’s smile that was beautiful as a flower blankly and silently nodded.....

## **Glossary**

\*When speaking to others, Troy oftentimes calls Lorana “Big sis” since Lorana doesn’t want to sound old

## Ch. 11

"Philes, get the unit to pack their stuff as we will be heading out."

Philes nodded while looking at me and asked: "All right, your majesty. But where are we going?"

I placed the document I was holding down, smiled at him and replied: "The south."

"The south?" He paused then revealed an "I see" smile. He then asked: "Are we returning to the royal capital?"

I looked at him and asked: "What's wrong? Do you miss your family?"

"I am all right." He looked at me and asked me back, "Your majesty, do you not miss home?"

"Me?" I chuckled and then shifted my posture to sit on angle in my chair. I said, "This is my home. Why would I miss home? Plus, I'm not going to the royal capital even if I head south. We're heading further south."

"So Castor?"

I shook my head and replied: "Technically speaking, Castor isn't in the south, is it? If anything, it's south-west. You don't have to guess. I'll tell you. I'm going to the desert."

"The desert?! The five nations of the desert?!" Philes looked at me utterly stunned. His throat budged..... That is the source of evil. If he didn't have an Adam's apple, he'd be a beautiful young girl..... He continued with hesitation, "Your majesty, the desert is not a fun place to be in..... Contrarily, it is extremely dangerous there. Not only is it a massive area of sand and heat, the scariest part is the sandstorms and bandits that pop up out of nowhere in there. They do everything from murder to robbery and more..... That place is basically an uncivilized place....."

I cut him off with frustration: "If I can't go to dangerous places, what would be the point of having you guys? Aren't you supposed to protect me? So go and prepare weapons and ammunition. Also, I think that your rifles will be useless

after a couple of shots so make swords your main weapon. How is the new instructor? How does she compare to Nier?"

He hesitated for a moment and then revealed an awkward smile. He said: "She is a bit gentler than Instructor Nier... I would say... very gentle... and very kind....."

"Oh....." I looked at his blushed smile. He looked shy like a young girl who'd fallen in love. The love of a young girl filled up my entire office, making my office feel like a castle from Disney. I smiled mischievously, rubbed my temples, put one leg over the other and... Wait. Why am I becoming more and more like Elizabeth these days.....? I narrowed my eyes as I looked at him, smiled and asked, "I don't really understand how a Valkyrie is so gentle. What's her name?"

"Her name is Shusia..... Shusia Gilliante."

Philes looked at me shyly. He placed his hands between his legs and rubbed them together while he pulled his two legs in together..... You're adamant about not being a girl, so could you please quit with the feminine mannerisms?! You're even more gentle and soft than Lucia, you know?!

I nodded with my eyes still on him and quietly recorded the name to memory. I'll mention it to mom when the time comes. She's a girl my team-captain likes after all. If I mention it to her when she's not happy, she'll probably go "Shusia, kill yourself", and then it'll be all over. Nier told me she was ordered to kill herself as well, but she defied the order because she wanted to be together with me. As for this Shusia though, I reckon she'd still have a sword run through her if she defied the order.

"Shusia, right?"

I looked at him and then picked up my cup of water to the side for a drink. He shuddered and then looked at me like he was on the brink of crying. He pleaded: "Your majesty, I beg you, I only like her. Can you please let me have her? Look, your two princesses are so beautiful... so you do not need more, right.....?"

"Pff!"

I almost spat the water in my mouth onto his face. I wiped my mouth and

said: "Am I the sort of scumbag who has to make everyone he meets his? I'm not one to steal another's love. Nier and Lucia would never let me have another either. I just wanted to make arrangements to have Shusia protected. You don't have to worry."

"I-Is that what it was about? ..... Umm... thank you very much then, your majesty....."

He sighed a breath of relief and then looked at me shyly and said: "But... there... there is a rumour going around with us that the Valkyries are actually women her majesty prepared for you, so... so....."

"Where the heck did that rumour come from.....?"

I waved my hand hopelessly and explained, "Nier and I are together because we love each other. We've gone through lots of things. I didn't get with her because she's the sword instructor for the Valkyries. The Valkyries are the empress's guard-unit. I frankly don't recommend you being with a Valkyrie because their rules and regulations are very strict. They don't interact with outsiders. If her majesty finds out about you and Shusia, you'll both be punished."

I tilted my head and then added, "But don't worry, I support you. Of course, you need to return alive from the desert first."

"Thank you so much, your majesty!" Philes looked at me with excitement. He didn't know what to say and spoke mumble jumble, "You gave me my life. You are helping me with my marriage too. You have truly helped me too much. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. You are right. We need to guarantee your safety. I will do my best to prepare for the journey to the desert. I will guard you with my life!"

"Your life alone is pointless. I need everyone to be like you. I only did you this small favour. The others need to be just as loyal."

"That is not a problem! Everyone respects you greatly and everyone is grateful that you treat us with so much courtesy!" Philes continued particularly seriously, "We will definitely do our absolute best to guard you. Your majesty, since you have decided to go to the south, we will now prepare. May I ask when we will be leaving?"

"In about ten days' time. You guys get ready."

I stood up and looked outside the window. It was dark outside already. I'm going to enjoy Nier's dinner now. Nier actually rarely cooks now because of her pregnancy. The chef has prepared most of the meals recently. However, Nier decided to cook for me before I left. This journey to the desert is a long one. Not even I know when I'll be able to come back.

I'm presuming I'll be back around spring.

I knew that they would be very happy if I stayed after listening to what Lucia had to say. However, they would be relieved if I left. After deliberating it, I thought that I couldn't let them down in regards to their hopes for me. I can't hide in moms' arms forever. What they want to see isn't me leading a simple life, but at least a strong me.

That's what I want as well as what my wives want.

I have to return alive, and I must get what I want. I must get my hands on that metal. I used to always be by my moms' side. I was always overshadowed by their greatness. I want to prove myself this time on my journey south. I want to prove that I too can possess strength.

Even if the strength isn't mine alone. The people around me can become my strength too.

## Ch. 12

“Ara, I see you’ve completed your preparations. How surprising. I thought you decided not to go after your blood left your head. I’m surprised to see that you’ve completed your preparations.”

“Am I a person who doesn’t keep his word and blurts out anything when his blood goes to his head to you?”

“Of course not, of course not.

The red-haired lady straightened up her posture as she laughed. She looked at the huge wooden carriage before her and complimented: “An Earth Dragon carriage. Only you would be able to come up with such a wild idea. But this is very good since we can transport a lot more now. But your majesty, you must know that the Earth Dragons consume more forage and water too.”

“That can’t be helped. I’m only bringing five Earth Dragon carriages. I stored weapons in every carriage then put water in two carriages, I put forage in two carriages and one of them will carry ammunition. As for our men’s supplies, I’ll just have them carry it with them since they can use the horse saddles as well.”

I ran my hand across the Earth Dragon’s scales. It seems like my fate is tied to these creatures. I came to this world because of these creatures and earned my first victory here in this world because of them. This time, they’re accompanying me to the most perilous place I’ve been to yet. If I find myself in danger this time, I don’t think anyone will be able to stop the charge of my Earth Dragons. I also prepared the potions Mommy-Vyvyan gave me. I’ll pour the ignite potion onto the long piece of cloth on the back of the carriage carrying ammunition. If I find myself surrounded and in danger, I’ll just have to break through the enemy lines. I reckon an explosive Earth Dragon carriage would be able to charge down a city’s gates with a single charge.

The men have completed their preparations too. I didn’t announce the journey to avoid alerting the two envoys from Socina City. All of our preparations were carried out extremely discreetly. However, my guard-unit knew where we were headed toward. My guard-unit was strictly forbidden

from entering bars and the red-light district. All of their entertainment was conducted within the palace grounds in a small rest station. That ensured that they wouldn't spill it after getting drunk.

And what part of entering bars and those sorts of places is like a soldier? Drinking and too much sexual activity will wear one out. What am I going to do with a drained soldier? The impact of heavy drinking and women is very serious, especially one like Nier. Nier has been sleeping early recently because of her pregnancy and doesn't do anything to me because of our child. That's why I've been full of energy recently as though my soul has returned to my body. I felt so joyous like I just recovered from a disease I'd been suffering from for a long time.

"Your majesty, your luggage is ready. You can set out whenever you like."

While I was having a chat with Lorana, Luna came up to me from behind. When she saw Lorana, she made a small bow and greeted her with a smile: "Miss Lorana, it is a great pleasure to meet you. Please look after me during our long journey."

Lorana froze up for a moment and then looked at me startled. She quietly asked: "Why are you bringing your maid? Isn't she just your maid? Wait, is she your mistress?! Wow son, that brave Inard only had Elizabeth and Vyvyan at the same time, yet you went for three! Tell the truth, do you have any more lovers?!"

I rolled my eyes at her then smiled helplessly and said: "Have you ever seen a man take his mistress to such a dangerous place with him? We're going to the desert not a summer resort. I don't have a choice. I can't bring Mommy-Vyvyan with me whenever I want so I must bring Luna to avoid going berserk on the full-moon night."

Luna nodded while looking at Lorana with a smile. Lorana looked at Luna's polite smile. She unexpectedly and suddenly lowered her head shyly, twirled her hair and then responded: "All right then. Whoever you decide to bring along isn't my business. Just don't hold the team back. Your majesty, due to the limited resources and water we have, we must travel a certain distance every day in the desert. If we are even slightly delayed, we will die in the desert for

sure. Therefore, you must decisively choose what to keep or abandon if it slows us down.”

I nodded and seriously replied: “I know.”

“Ara, ara. I thought you were going to seclude yourself and not appear again teacher. It looks like you are back in business. Our Galadriel tribe must thank you properly, teacher.”

Just as Lorana went to speak, a chuckle came from behind. She turned her head around to see Vyvyan coming over with Elizabeth. She responded: “Isn’t this my job? The purpose of my existence is to wipe your Galadriel tribe’s ass, like with Elizabeth and now with your child.”

“Are you helping my son because of us, teacher? Allow me to thank you then, teacher.”

Elizabeth bowed respectfully. Luna’s body jolted from fear. I pulled Luna behind me to hide her and held her hand. There’s no need to be shocked by that. Do people not know she’s their teacher? She’s no ordinary elf. She’s the continent’s number one sword saint!

Lorana laughed heartily. She then patted them on their shoulders and said: “That’s not entirely true. I usually do things because of you two since you’re my favourite students and students who’ve accompanied me for so long. Plus, you’re the two strongest women of this continent. Most importantly though, is that I love your child which is why I help him.”

As soon as she said that last part, the atmosphere became extremely awkward like the air around froze all of a sudden. The smiles on Elizabeth and Vyvyan’s face vanished and they looked at Lorana with a hostile gaze. She looked back at them with puzzlement, completely lost as to what just happened.

Elizabeth looked at Lorana and sternly said: “Teacher, if you need a man, just pick one from the continent. You can take any of them regardless of how handsome or strong they are..... However, please do not develop any feelings for my son. It would be best if you kept it strictly to respect and not be fond of him. That applies whether you are his elder or as an individual of the opposite sex. If you do something to my son during this journey, I will challenge you to a

duel even if you are my most respected teacher.”

Vyvyan nodded. One of her eyes changed colour and became filled with murderous intent. She looked at Lorana and coldly said: “Do not forget who you are. You are but just our teacher. You have no right to do anything to my son. I gave birth to my son. His blood, flesh, bones and soul all belong to me. It’s normal for him to like me and love me. I will not allow a third person to confess their fondness for my child. Never.”

“Hey, hey, hey, aren’t you two a little too sensitive?”

Lorana laughed and then patted me on my shoulder firmly. I almost dropped to my knees because of her strength. She then explained: “I’m here to protect your son this time. I don’t have those sorts of thoughts for your son. Moreover, I’m older than you two. How could I have feelings for this kid? You two think too much.”

“Good then.”

The atmosphere returned to normal. My two mothers left a few words and then left.

While watching the two of them leave, Lorana asked me in a startled tone: “Hey... your majesty..... how did those two agree to your marriages?”

“There’s another yet to be explained mystery in the world now.....”

## Ch. 13

“Your majesty, I have not seen you when I visited these days. You finally have time now.”

I looked at the envoy from Socina City blocking my door and scratched my head very awkwardly. I frankly really don’t want to see him right now even though I quite liked him initially. It’s just that the things I’ve been doing recently have basically been stamping on his owner’s foot so I felt a little guilty.

Freya looked at him with an impartial smile and explained: “Did I not tell you? His majesty took a few days break due to just getting married. It would not be fair on his majesty or the princess for him to immediately return to work upon getting married. Also, it is not polite to be blocking the door to his majesty’s office. His highness is not slacking. If you have business with him, just make an appointment with his majesty. There is no need for you to behave like this. It is like you have to block the door to see his majesty when he is not involving himself with politics. What would her majesty and her highness think if they suddenly came here and saw this scene? Your behaviour has disappointed me greatly.”

“I apologise. I am very sorry. I am very sorry, your majesty. I failed to think this through. I hope I have not caused you trouble.”

He made a deep bow then urgently raised his head and asked: “But should we continue with our discussion where we left off half-way through? Have you received any other requests to meet with you from other envoys?”

Freya looked at the envoy and asked him with a smile before I could speak: “Ara, you sure catch news quickly. Your guess is correct. His majesty is going to see that envoy now. How strange. Why has Socina City sent two envoys here at once? Could it be that Socina City requires two jobs from his majesty?”

We all know what’s going on here. Freya was just pretending to be ignorant since she purposely met the two of them privately at different times, and arranged for them to stay far away from each other.

They shouldn’t have run into each other. But they must have. That would

explain why he came here to see me urgently.

The envoy waved his hand to deny it. He looked at me anxiously and replied: "No... it should be for the same thing, just a different client. Your majesty, could you have agreed to their request?"

Freya cut him off irritably: "Did I not just say we were going to see him now? I do not believe that you have the right to know what his majesty or they are discussing. I would appreciate it if you do not try to dig further than you need to know. This is the royal family's business. As an envoy, you need only pass on the message of your master. If you cross that boundary, Socina City will be held responsible for any consequences."

"You must listen to me!"

It didn't look like the envoy cared for Freya's warning. Or rather, he understood her warning but just wasn't afraid. He looked at me with a fearless gaze like those who led the revolution back then and sternly exclaimed: "I hope you will reject them regardless of what they offer. Whatever they can offer, we can too. We can take a step back on our conditions as long as you reject them, your majesty!"

Freya looked at his panicked expression with a devil's smile and said: "Is that so? Now that you say that, we have become interested. You need not concern yourself with our business. His majesty does not know anything about Socina City and naturally holds neutral feelings toward Socina City. Since they want to discuss business with us as well, we will need to compare the offers we have received. You do not need to be so naive. You should be aware that Socina City and Troy City are in no way connected, so we cannot mention friendships. Your lord has yet to come and pay his majesty a visit, so we cannot say that we have a good impression. As such, we will make our judgement solely based on the benefits you offer us."

"Your majesty!! Let us discuss it again then, alright? Let us discuss the details of our business!"

"Sorry, but not right now. We need to go to the guest room and see the envoy. We will need you to make an appointment with his majesty to go over the details. His majesty is not slacking. His majesty needs to sort out a pile of

documents in the upcoming days and is therefore very busy. You did come here unreasonably and against regulations. You have also shown a complete lack of manners blocking the door like this. So please return for today. We shall speak another day."

Freya tugged my sleeve to tell me to quickly leave. I nodded and then we quickly stepped to the side to leave.

"Your majesty!! Your majesty! Please wait! When is the earliest we can speak?!"

Freya turned her head around, considered his question and then replied: "About a month from now?"

The envoy froze up in place and looked at me blankly without knowing what to do: "A... a month?"

"Yes. Have you forgotten that his majesty has two princesses? He needs to go to the elven lands to spend time with his other princess next so I will be in charge of all matters within the city for the coming period." Freya looked at him with a smile and then elaborated: "If you need to see his majesty, please wait around a month. If you feel that your business is urgent, you can discuss it with me when I am available. I will consider it seriously. I am his majesty's younger sister and onii-sama has given me the right to handle this matter."

Freya narrowed her eyes a little while still looking at him with an odd smile. She followed up by asking: "So what would you like to do?"

That was a savage question from Freya. The envoy couldn't answer. Like, how would you answer? Wait a month? In that case, he wouldn't have the right to see Freya while she is here during this period since she wouldn't see him. If he chooses to discuss it with me then that means Freya won't cross her boundaries and speak on my behalf. If he chooses to discuss it with Freya then that means he has chosen to speak to someone else right in front of my face. Even if Freya had the right to speak on my behalf, there are my feelings to consider. If I get upset about it then it will impact what he wants to discuss.

Freya didn't want to wrestle with him anymore so she created a dilemma where he couldn't even make an appointment to discuss the matter.

“That... that... umm... I.....”

The envoy couldn't answer as expected. The corner of Freya's mouth crept up into a victorious smile. She then said: “That is precisely why you need to follow the rules. If you had made an appointment, you would have been the one in the guest room. Your impulse led to you losing the chance to discuss it. Let us go, your majesty, it is time. Let's not make our guest wait for too long..... Oh right, if you cannot make up your mind right now, please return and think about it carefully, and then choose a time to see us. Goodbye.”

Freya tugged my sleeve harder this time, leaving behind the envoy and his hopeless and dejected look. The two of us hurried to the door of the guest room. Freya then patted her chest and said: “That person just now was so clingy. However, that proves that the fighting in Socina City is serious.”

“What do you think then, Freya?”

“What do I think?” Freya paused for a moment and then continued, “You must give yourself an alternative route at all times. Do not place all your eggs in one basket. We shall drag this out, not agreeing or disappointing him. As soon as you get your hands on what you want over there, the deal can continue.”

I pointed into the guest room and asked: “That what about our guest in here?”

“The same goes of course. You cannot put all your eggs in one basket, but no one said you only had two baskets.”

Freya smiled and then pushed the door to the guest room open.

## Ch. 14

“Son, have you finished preparing for your journey?” Elizabeth picked up a cup of wine and handed it to me. She then walked over to the bed and patted the spot next to her. I walked over and sat down next to her. Vyvyan sat on the chair to the side and looked at Elizabeth grumpily. She complained: “Elizabeth, that’s not right for you to do now, is it? He’s my child and yet you called him over to you?”

“Pat the spot next to you and let’s see if he goes over to you then.”

Elizabeth glared at her. I smiled helplessly and looked at them while feeling like I was in a dilemma. I’m not against them fighting for me, but could you not summon me like I’m a pet? Pat the spot next to you and I come over? What am I, a dog? I walked over out of habit. Elizabeth always pats the spot next to her and I’d go over to sit there so I forgot about Vyvyan who was sitting there to the side.

Vyvyan clenched her teeth then had a drink and in a somewhat angry tone asked: “Now I’m mad. Why don’t we meet in the elven imperial capital? Why must it be here?”

“You said you wanted to see my son off, so naturally you should come here. He’s leaving tomorrow. Shouldn’t you come and see him?”

Vyvyan knocked the cup on the table over, looked at Elizabeth and angrily exclaimed: “I didn’t agree to this right from the start. My son has met with danger lots of times here in humanity’s lands. When were you humans ever able to protect my son? Elizabeth, my powers are effective against you humans. It’s more relaxed and merry with us than it is with you. Or rather, everybody around you has sinister motives!”

Elizabeth hugged me then looked at Vyvyan, smiled and responded like she was dismissing the claim: “That’s normal. All humans are selfish. Those who aren’t selfish are our propaganda materials. We’d be fortunate to have one among hundred that isn’t selfish. You want me to rely on that minute population to manage such a large empire? What a joke.”

Vyvyan retorted with anger: "You should know that there are people plotting against my son, shouldn't you?! I noticed someone holding ill-will toward my son at the banquet last time. If we weren't here in humanity, I'd have hacked him to death! And yet you don't even think about that?! My son is about to journey far away to the desert in the south. Do you seriously think I feel at ease?"

Elizabeth sat straight up, placed her cup of wine to the side and sternly said: "Who was it? Tell me whoever it is. I'll kill him regardless of who he is."

I sat up as well and looked at Vyvyan seriously. I wanted to know too. Who's plotting against me? I'm now very sensitive about this sort of stuff. The last time someone went after me, I lost Mera. So when Vyvyan mentioned it, it caused me to recall Mera's cold corpse in my arms and the irritating stench of blood.

I didn't have time to deal with Castor this time in regards to the incident with the church so I didn't deal with the regent of Castor. I left that matter in the empress's hands. However, the situation there is still unstable while the empress is somewhat holding back from taking action against their regent for fear of involving the innocent. I'm not too bothered by it. I never thought there would still be someone after my life after that incident.

Just how many people here in humanity want to kill me? I would be very worried and scared if I was my past self. I would get sick of people trying to kill me. But after Mera, I was no longer scared of such things. And I won't be afraid of them. To the contrary, I want them to come and try to take my life. As a king, there will surely be people who want to take your life. As a qualified king, I must be conscious of assassins, and I must be able to crush their schemes.

Therefore I believe I am able to crush anyone who tries to make an attempt on my life no matter who they are.

Vyvyan grumbled: "It's that young man, the one that was hitting on all the girls there that day. He has nothing but contempt and murderous intent for my son, yet you keep him around?"

"Oh, him." All of the vigilance in Elizabeth's eyes dissipated. She laughed then picked up her cup of wine again and continued, "He's not a threat. He's just a

playboy. Though his father wields some power, he definitely won't be a threat to my son. He doesn't have that much competence. Nothing to worry about."

Vyvyan looked at her with nothing but doubt and said: "Is that really true? I won't let you answer me so plainly. This pertains to my child's safety. If something happens to my son here in humanity's lands, I'll put my Galadriel tribe's name on the line to wipe out you humans."

Elizabeth looked at her and replied in a serious tone: "The same goes for me, Vyvyan. He's my son. It's a given I'll protect him. But at the same time, I won't spoil him. He's my son, but he's also the next emperor. I can't keep him by my side forever. He needs to have his own power and accomplishments so that he can inherit the crown safely. I'm allowing him to go there precisely because I love him."

Oh, is that so now? I recall you being the first person to stop me~.....

Vyvyan angrily retorted: "You still need to keep my son safe then! I was strongly against his journey this time and I still am. However, since this is his decision, I shall not complain. But son, you must remember that as long as there's danger, just run. You don't need to concern yourself with anything. Do you remember what you promised mommy? You must run. You can get anything back, but you're mommy's only child."

I nodded and replied: "I know. I will keep my promise."

Vyvyan glared at me and exclaimed: "As if I'll believe you! You say that every time, but you stand in the front of others every single time. You make empty promises all the time!"

Elizabeth laughed loudly and then pulled me down onto the bed. She pinched my face with a smile and asked: "But I like my son's courage and sense of duty. Aren't you the same, Vyvyan? Would you miss him so much if he was the type of kid who hid in his mom's arms all the time?"

Vyvyan stood up and walked up to the bed. She lay down on my other side and hugged my arm. She then pinched the other side of my face and said: "That's true. Mommy likes her own child exactly because of that....."

"This is a rare opportunity so let's sleep like this tonight....."

What?! What now?!! Let go of me you two! Let go! I once said that getting a booby face-wash from one mom caused me to lose the ability to breathe, and yet now I was caught left, right, top and bottom. Using their most affectionate posture, my two moms buried my head deeply within between their breasts. I was virtually completely shoved into a shell, not to mention their hands stroking my head and their legs wrapped around my waist.....

Elizabeth stroked my head with all of her affection and said: "Let's stay like this since you're leaving. We won't have to be angry now."

Vyvyan stroked my face and tenderly said: "True that. I won't argue with you for the timing being too. Son, you must come back alive."

Save me..... Save me..... I can't breathe..... I'm dying..... I'm seriously suffocating..... Sacrifice before achieving triumph when setting off always makes heroes sorrowful with tears afterward since antiquity..... Save me..... Hurry and save me.....

Elizabeth whispered into my ear in a hoarse voice: "Mommy... mommy... doesn't actually... want to let you go....."

Vyvyan went silent for a moment and then softly said: "Mommy doesn't want to let you go either..... Mommy wants to be by your side too..... Mommy can't bear to part with you, but..... Mommy... mommy can't be an obstacle for you..... If you want... son..... you still need to go....."

I forced myself to reply: "I know....."

Elizabeth hugged me tightly and cried as she said: "Let mommy give you a good hug now then. Let mommy give you a good hug....."

## Ch. 15

“You didn’t come back last night.”

Nier hugged me and thumped my chest gently with her head.

I hugged her gently and whispered next to her ear: “Sorry, my moms kept me last night... so I couldn’t come back. You must’ve waited for me all night. I told you not to wait.”

“Because I’m afraid..... I’m afraid that it would be the last time I wait for you.....”

Nier looked up at me then gently cupped my face and kissed my lips. I closed my eyes and relished her lips and love. The two of us kissed sincerely and passionately. We were passionate enough to metaphorically eat each other.

However, I was geared up in military attire. I had to leave in ten minutes.

After we released each other, I stroked Nier’s face and told her: “Don’t say that. I’ll definitely come back. Nier, you need to look after yourself here. Let her majesty know if you have any concerns or need something. Do not try to deal with it alone and don’t go anywhere dangerous. Look after yourself well.”

Nier wrapped her arms around my neck with a smile, bit my ear and then said: “I know. I know, dear..... Dear, you need to be careful in the desert too. It’s dangerous there. You don’t know how to wield a sword and your guards aren’t as good as I am. I can’t accompany you this time so don’t be impulsive and charge head-on.”

“Uhm, I know.”

Nier and I separated. She then took out a small-cloth pouch and handed it to me. The small pouch was like a bookmark. She carefully placed it into my chest pocket. With a shy smile she said: “This is a protective talisman I made for you, dear. Since I can’t be by your side, let the talisman protect you. You must come back as soon as possible. I’ll be waiting for you. I will surely be waiting for you.”

I responded with a nod. I kissed Nier’s forehead then touched my chest with a smile and said: “I’m heading out now then, Nier. I’ll be back as soon as I can.

Look after yourself."

"I will."

I walked out, but I couldn't stop the urge to turn back and look at her. I saw Nier watching me leave. She bit down on her lip to force herself to hold back her tears. Her initially emotionless green eyes were now brimming with tears like a broken piece of emerald.

"Nier....."

I stopped in my tracks and turned around. My heart felt like it was being cut over and over again. I felt like I always wanted to leave. I always wanted to build my own power. I had always been here trying to atone for my powerlessness when Mera died, so I wanted to become a qualified king.

I'd always thought that. That's why I was able to decide on this. This was my first exploit where I completely took it upon myself, to complete a king's job on my own. That's why I prepared so enthusiastically. I've asked everyone around me for their opinion on my decision this time and finally made up my mind.

But when I saw Nier's expression like she was on the verge of crying, I thought of mom's tears last night when they both agreed to let me leave. I couldn't bear to leave now. I looked into Nier's eyes and the pain in my chest virtually brought me to my knees. She's my love, yet she was wearing a painful expression before me so how could I not be in pain myself?

"Nier... I... I....."

Toss it. I'm not going anymore.....

I opened my arms wanting to pull her into my arms tightly. I really wanted to hold her tightly in my embrace right now. I wanted to hug her tightly and never leave her again.

She looked at me and shuddered. She couldn't hold back her tears anymore, letting big droplets of tears course down her cheeks. Her green eyes looked like shattered pieces of emerald. She walked over to me slowly and opened her arms.

Nier. My love.

Hold me. Let me hold you tightly. If you hug me now, I won't be able to resist. My weak last line of resistance and courage will vanish in your arms. You just need to hug me again. You just need to tell me not to leave one more time and I'll immediately cancel the journey. My hard work over the last few days can't hold a candle to your tears that move my heart even more.

"Nier... I... I....."

Nier walked up to me with open arms. I waited for her to hug me.

But then when she stood before me, she didn't hug me with her arms. Instead, she gave me a strong push. I staggered out of my room. The sunshine from the end of the corridor was bright like golden wings covering my entire body for that one moment. The golden light shone onto making Nier, her expression and tears stand out.

"Please give it your best, your majesty."

She didn't say "Please stay".

She said "Please give it your best".

"Ah....."

I looked at Nier's expression. It looks like I read her expression wrong. Inside Nier's gaze wasn't just pain and reluctance. Her iron-will and courage were still there. Maybe it's because I rarely see the determination deep in Nier's eyes. Her noble and brave heart won't change or disappear because her status has changed and now that she's with me.

Like metal and rocks, time and vanity can only leave an insignificant small scratch on her heart. The determination in Nier's eyes had never reduced at all.

"I understand. I will do my best."

I looked at Nier's eyes and revealed a relieved smile. She looked at me with her faced covered in tears and revealed a relieved smile as well.

I flicked my cape and the sunrays shining in from the side lit up my eyes a little. My cape made flapping sounds in the wind. My leather boots were firmly placed on the ground. I walked to the entrance absolutely determined. I didn't hesitate this time nor did I turn my head back around. The pain in my heart

stopped and I felt light like a rubber ball pumped completely full of air.

I don't need to turn around anymore because the person behind me definitely doesn't want me to turn around. I had no reason to turn around either. Nier didn't need me by her side all the time just like Lucia didn't.

They understood that I wasn't just their husband, but a king as well. Therefore, they were determined not to be dead-weight holding me back. If you were to ask me what I gained in this world or what made me happy, my answer would be my two wives. They're the greatest things I gained and what make me happiest. And that will hold true forever.

"Your majesty!"

When I arrived outside, I saw the golden edges on my guard-unit's uniforms shimmering brightly and gloriously under the sun. I looked at all of their faces and nodded without saying anything. Freya led a horse over. I mounted the horse then stroked her head and softly said: "I'm leaving the city in your hands. Look after Nier. I'm worried that she might not be willing to speak to her majesty while Luna isn't with her, so I'll need to trouble you, Freya. Do you have too much work? If you can't handle all of it, go ask Castell for assistance."

Freya chuckled softly and then replied: "You are over-concerned. This sort of stuff is considered relaxing compared to when I was in the church. Look after yourself, onii-sama."

"I know."

I looked over my men from atop my horse. The sunlight made their guns and the metal buttons on their uniform shine. They stood in a neat formation, ready to move like an unshakable army. I looked at them with pride and a sense of glory.

"Men, I don't need to say anymore. This is going to be a long battle. I have one word that means more than thousands of words, and that is, march!"

"Roger!!"

The journey south was actually quite joyous. To avoid revealing my plan, I took a detour to the elven border first so that the envoys would see my final traces at the elven lands. Once I got there, I took another path south. When we got to the royal capital, we rested for a while also for the purpose of letting Lorana buy new supplies. We stayed inside the royal palace at night. There were no other flourishing cities further south so this was the soldiers' last rest and supplies replenishment stop.

"Your majesty, your washed clothes are ready."

Luna came up to me with a pile of clothes and placed them in front of me. I nodded then stood up and put the book in my hand down. I looked at my outer court feeling a little nostalgic and said: "I haven't been back here in a long time. This place is quite nostalgic. Luna, how are the maids?"

Luna smiled then looked around and replied: "The maids were very happy to see you return since they get really bored when you are not around. Your majesty, when will be the next time we return? To be honest, this place is filled with memories for me. Lots of things happened between you and I here after all, and they were all very happy things."

I grabbed hold of Luna's hands. She didn't resist and instead looked at me with hope. I stroked her head with a smile and replied: "I too really like this place. Too many things happened here. I met Nier and the rest of you here."

Luna's gaze turned blank when she heard Nier's name, but then she quickly returned to normal. She smiled and said: "It is getting late, your majesty. We need to continue the journey tomorrow, so you should go and take a bath. After that... rest up, your majesty..... Without Miss Nier... you... you....."

I smiled and then stroked her head. I don't hate sleeping with Luna. Luna's very skilled. It's just that I'm married now. It's not right for me to be intimate like that with Luna again. But because Nier rode my hips every night, I've felt a little lonely and agitated the last two nights without anyone by my side.

Luna looked at me and held my hand. She softly said: "Your majesty, I am alright. If you need me, I am alright with it..... Plus, I really like it too..... If possible..... Please let me take care of you tonight, your majesty... since we will be heading into danger and... if... if I die....."

I covered her mouth then kissed her forehead and said: “Don’t say that sort of stuff, Luna. You’ll be fine. You’re my only personal servant. I won’t let anything happen to you. If something happens, I’ll do my best to protect you because you are the one and only for me.”

“Your majesty.....”

“Have a good rest.”

I stroked Luna’s head and then picked up my clothes and left the room. I closed the door gently and let out a soft sigh. I touched my chest and felt the small protective talisman thump gently with my heart beat. I took the talisman out and gently ran my hand over the somewhat rough surface. I smiled and said to myself: “I feel like you’re still by my side, Nier. Am I wrong?”

“Please enjoy, your majesty.”

After placing a serve of grilled meat and frozen fruit wine on the tray down, the two maids got up and left. I soaked myself in the warm water comfortably. It was so comfortable that I moaned. Immersing myself in this bath of warm water that’s like a swimming pool is seriously too comfortable and too blissful. I reached my hand out to tear up the piece of grilled meat in front of me and then had a drink of the frozen fruit wine.

This hot-outside cold-inside feeling was marvellous. The soothing feeling made my mind go blank. I didn’t want to think about anything anymore. Being useless like this feels pretty good too.

Hot water and women can weaken one’s resolve and body as I thought!

I closed my eyes and listened to the water gently swish around. The only sound around was the sound of water swishing around and running water. This soothing feeling.....

“Splash.....”

Why was there the sound of something entering the water all of a sudden? Is it mom? I’m already used to it if it’s mom. I’m used to both Vyvyan and Elizabeth’s behaviours. Now what? I don’t care if it’s a booby face-wash or groping me since they’ve done it countless times already anyway.

But nobody came over. The person who entered the water seemed to stop moving. That's when I suddenly realised that I was in the royal capital right now! I'm in the royal capital! Elizabeth and Vyvyan couldn't be here! One of them is at Troy City while the other is at the imperial capital, so they can't be here! So who's next to me right now?!

Luna. Luna is a maid. She isn't allowed to enter my bathroom unless I call for her. Only my personal vassals may enter my bathroom. Which means only Nier, Lucia and Freya would be allowed to enter my bathroom. But then none of them are here with me!

I opened my eyes and noticed that half of the grilled piece of meat had been torn off. I saw red hair waving around before my eyes. Lorana lowered her head, tore into the piece of meat and then gulped mouthfuls of my ice-wine down. She then let out a big sigh and then her body shivered. She said: "You sure know how to enjoy yourself, your majesty. It feels pretty damn amazing to eat like this."

"Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey!! Why are you here next to me?"!

I shrieked before covering my chest and retreating to one side. She wiped the water that splashed on her face as a result of me jumping up with annoyance and said: "You don't have to react so surprised do you, your majesty? You've seen plenty of female bodies, haven't you? Is there still any need for you to be surprised like that about this? Moreover, I'm old enough to be your mother so I don't care about your body. So there's no need for you to be shy."

"No, no, no..... Wh-wh-wh-why did you appear next to me?!"

"Didn't you ask me to come?!"

"No! Why did you come into my bathroom!"

"You want me to strip around those soldiers?" Lorana frowned and then pinched my shoulder to pull me back over. She then draped her arm around my shoulder. She waved the grilled piece of meat around as she explained, "Your majesty, I don't want to change in front of others either. I'm a woman at the end of the day. I'm like this around you because I see you as my son."

"Don't be like that. I already have two moms, so I won't need a third. Further,

if Vyvyan and Elizabeth discover that you see yourself as my mom, they'll seriously get angry. Plus, there's that Valkyrie, Shusia. She's here as well, so why didn't you go and have a bath with her?"

"She's playing around outside with that punk Philes... Ah....."

She realised she had a slip of the tongue so she covered her mouth as she looked at me. I didn't allow anyone to leave the grounds. You're my guard, a soldier. What sort of soldier leaves to go play whenever they want? But I'll turn a blind eye to this..... I looked at Lorana, got a little serious and said: "I'll overlook it. But how much do you know about the desert we're headed to?"

She looked at me and then replied seriously: "Not much. However, there's one thing you must know. There's no room for mercy or softness in the desert. You will also never be able to tame the desert, so please do away with your sympathy and merciful nature while we're in the desert. Only blades can open a path in the desert. Your kindness is useless in there."

## Ch. 17

I couldn't sleep too well that night since a young guy is bound to have perverted thoughts after sharing a bath an older-sister type female. Whenever I shut my eyes, the scene in the bathroom resurfaced in my mind. I can't knock on Luna's door to do "that" with her either..... So I was mentally degraded the next day of the journey..... Luna looked at me somewhat concerned and asked: "What is the matter, your majesty? Did you not sleep well last night? Or did you miss Miss Nier?"

I smiled helplessly. They were connected somewhat, except that I wasn't missing Nier..... Luna could've helped me out..... But what am I going to tell Luna? I shook my head and replied: "Nothing, Luna. I just didn't get enough sleep. But it's all right. Let's continue."

"You must speak out if you do not feel well."

Luna looked at me hesitantly. I looked ahead and didn't say anything. Luna doesn't know how to ride horses so she rode with Lorana. If Luna gets tired, I'll

let her rest in a Earth Dragon carriage. I reckon the Earth Dragon carriage is my best invention yet because it's particularly stable and it has plenty of space. Mom originally intended to give me a few more Earth Dragons so that I could make a small room out of one carriage. Inside would be a bed and I could take a few maids with me too, but I turned the offer down.

I'm going for business, not a vacation after all. I need guards, not maids holding me back. I looked behind me at the horse carriages and Earth Dragon escorts in the middle. The Earth Dragon carriage escort walked steadily on the ground like an old ox. For safety's sake, I spread the weapons out in the five carriages. That way, they won't end up all lost if we get attacked. Repeated-firing guns are extremely lethal weapons to humans after all. They're one of my secret weapons for my journey south this time.

I asked Mommy-Vyvyan to cast a time-boundary around the Earth Dragon carriages transporting large volumes of ammunition and gun-powder, to keep the gun-powder within its safe timeframe. The only way to remove the boundary is by opening the door to the storage. This way, if someone were to attack my escorts and explode my carriage carrying gun-powder, my guard unit won't be completely wiped out by the attack.

My guards are currently armed with one sword and one gun which has a barrel that allows for six shots. We will only have to open the storage for them to reload gun-powder if we enter a prolonged fight. If we're only entering skirmishes then they shouldn't need to empty their guns, and we can reload after reaching safety.

The great plains of the south certainly live up to their reputation. We've been travelling for half a day since leaving the royal capital yet we were still in the wild great plains. There were only harvested crops and Earth Dragon cages in the snow. Lorana felt unwell due to the weather so she was curled up atop her horse and silent. She wrapped herself up with her thick cloak. I felt sorry for her. She couldn't withstand the cold winters here despite living in humanity's lands for so long.

We're still not that far from the royal capital so we should be able to see inns and hotels. I usually like hotels more because I don't want to trouble an inn as the prince. Inns are tiny with only one or two people working there. Asking one

or two people to take care of the hundreds of people here would be too exhausting, and we'd be hogging society's resources.

It shouldn't be so prosperous further south since the population in the desert isn't as large and they don't have as much money. The people there don't want to come to the royal capital either. Due to the routes, the five nations of the desert rarely ever interact with the Rosvenor Empire in the south. Mom only sent three armies there when she expanded her territory. The five nations of the desert were powerless to resist and therefore became vassal states. However, because of how far apart they were, the governance over the five nations was very relaxed. They just had to send tributes on time and acknowledge that the Rosvenor Empire ruled over them. Needless to say, they had to accept the protection of the empire's army stationed there.

The empire's army only provides protection. They do not meddle with the public safety and internal politics there. As such, the five nations haven't changed as a result of the Rosvenor Empire's rule. Perhaps that is why the people of the five nations don't have any intent to revolt.

But since Castor loaned money from the five nations of the desert, the five nations should be rich nations since they produce a large volume of metal. Those metals aren't worth much money in the desert in the south. In the north however, the minerals are worth precious gems. The black fuel the empress's army uses comes from the desert as well.

Consequently, the desert's five nations has always been an important trading spot. Melodious bells have always rang out in the desert as merchants bring over exquisite hand-made goods to exchange them for carriages of minerals and silk to take back. As long as you can make it through the sandstorms and the attack of bandits in the desert and return, you'll have great chances of making big money.

However, that's precisely why only about half of the people who come manage to return safely. The Rosvenor Empire's merchant groups are the only groups who are able to leave the desert with goods. Castell is also the only one who can provide the royal family with a constant import of minerals, fuel and silk.

The purpose of our journey into the desert this time is to locate a new mine. According to the reports received, the mine has an abundance of minerals. As a result, lots of people are after the rights of ownership to it, especially investment-merchants up north. The large volume of people coming to the desert for it is crazy like the gold rush in America back then. We're pretty much behind the ball.

The intel came from an adventurer. But when they found him, he was already taking his last breaths. He said that he saw a sky full of gold lights. If he wasn't carrying a rock with gold in it, nobody would've believed him. They believed him because they saw him carrying the rock as it was a very rarely seen ore. If it could be found on the surface that meant there had to be more underground.

Thus, everybody is looking for the place he claimed he saw gold lights everywhere. He couldn't point out exactly where it was himself. He only provided a rough approximate. Hence, nobody has located it up until now. Not even Lorana could find a clue when she personally went.

I don't know if we'll be able to locate it this time. I really hope we'll be able to find it. However, I am aware how grim my situation is. Both of Socina City's powers have sent out their people, all sorts of other idle forces as well as the bandits roaming the desert. It really is a chaotic field in the desert. There are no allies and sides. Bullets and blades are your only capital for negotiations.

Maybe I'll witness plenty of bloodshed in the desert.

I turned my head around and took one final look at the royal capital in the distance. The glorious golden text "long live the emperor" written at the tallest tower in the royal capital's slowly vanished from sight as the sun set. I looked in that direction until we were enshrouded in darkness, until I couldn't see the gold reflection any longer.

That was my final glimpse of a cultured and peaceful place. I might not get to enjoy any peaceful days for the coming time.

"Your majesty, let's hurry and find a place to rest. I'm about to freeze to death."

"All right, sister. Scouts, go and see if there is a hotel ahead."

“Roger!”

## Ch. 18

Having travelled for days, the sand beneath our horses’ hooves began to gradually get thicker. We had finally left the last place which had traces of Rosvenor Empire. We were finally standing atop the sand dunes. Having just come from the cold Rosvenor Empire, I could truly feel the temperature gradually increase. There was no mana being sprayed around in this region, but I could feel the heat of the desert. The winds felt even fiercer than in the north, while the spiralling tiny specks of sand felt like they were cutting my face.

We advanced along a small road in the desert. We hadn’t seen anyone in a long time since entering the desert. Even when we saw small villages, there were just over ten homes. It was as though this was a desolate area. While it seemed as though the sun didn’t exist in the north, it felt like a volcano spitting lava sat overhead here.

When we entered the desert, we switched into the sets Lorana had prepared for us. The pure white cloth hoodie fastened our cape to our chest. We wore thin gloves designed for the desert and switched into high-boots. We shoved our pants into our long boots before tying them up.

It was actually quite comfortable in the intense sun with our pure-white cape and long robe. Tying up our boots and collars also helped prevent sand from getting in, but we could still pour out a pile of sand when we camped at night. The temperature in the desert at night was significantly different. You could even say it was extremely cold at night in the desert.

Lorana took care of everything to do with our camps in the desert. She led us to find places where we could avoid the winds behind sand dunes and she was able to proficiently set up very sturdy tents. Alice told me that building a nation with the people as the foundation was the equivalent of building it on sand, as in it being unreliable for stability and sand being incapable of thinking. This time, I felt Lorana had something to say.

“Luna, have some water.”

I handed Luna some water. Luna massaged her calves with a smile and then took the cup. She giggled softly and responded: “I apologise, your majesty. I should be the one that is taking care of you yet I need you to take care of me now.....”

“It’s nothing. As long as you’re alright, that’s all that matters.”

Luna felt a little unwell during the day today. I think she had a heat stroke. I undressed her and placed her in the Earth Dragon carriage carrying water for her to rest. Luna had basically recovered by night time. However, Luna hasn’t been too well lately. It looks like her past experiences have long-term effects on her health. She appeared ill the entire time once we entered the desert.

Sitting next to her, I rubbed her head with a smile. I then pulled a mat over and wrapped us up together. I said: “Don’t worry about that sort of stuff in this situation. Didn’t big sis say that there are no statuses in the desert? There are only your friends and companions. You’re my companion now, Luna, so it’s natural for me to look after you.”

“Is it...?” Luna smiled. She looked up at the stars overhead and said, “I am very happy, your majesty..... It is not that I do not like being your personal servant, but this is the first time I have had the right to look you in the eye, your majesty. This feeling makes me really happy.”

“Have some.”

I handed Luna a bowl of porridge. Luna got startled. She looked at the floating bits of apple and milk in the bowl and then looked at me slightly surprised. I asked Vyvyan to cast time magic on some fruits, except I didn’t bring much since I wanted to focus on bringing more important things. You can consider something exclusive for me. But I cut an apple up for Luna since she wasn’t feeling well.”

“Your majesty... this... this.....”

“Ah, this is Earth Dragon milk.....” The taste of Earth Dragon’s milk doesn’t taste too bad. It tastes like cow-milk except a little sweeter. However, I don’t get to enjoy it often since it contains mana. It wouldn’t cause a big reaction

inside me per se, but I will get a stomach ache.....

“Yes..... I know that... but... but... giving this to me.....”

Luna stuttered as she looked at me while her hands holding the bowl trembled. I looked at her and smiled. I explained: “Just have it. Didn’t I tell you that you were my companion now? Luna, if you’re unwell, you’ll slow us down. You must take care of yourself now so that you can continue staying by my side to take care of me.”

“..... Uhm.”

She hesitated for a moment before having small sips. She then looked up and wiped the white milk off her mouth. She then handed me the remainder and said: “Your majesty, you should have the rest. If you are unwell, then I will be in trouble too.”

“Luna.....”

“Please have it.”

I looked at Luna’s gaze. I picked up the bowl and had the remaining half. Luna picked up the bowl as she looked at me slightly cheerfully. Her slender fingers wrapped around the bowl. I suddenly realised something. Did I just have an indirect kiss with Luna?! Ah..... But it’s fine, right? We’ve kissed for real after all, so I guess I don’t need to be bothered by this.

After placing the bowl down, Luna and I wrapped ourselves up, and then comfortably leaned back onto the sand dune. We looked up at the stars in the sky. The stars in this world are very beautiful. The entire sky was filled with shining stars. This world is different to the world I came from. The moon here dims and brightens up according to how bright the stars are. Not only were the stars in the sky shiny right now, the moon was like a lighthouse.

The cold wind in the desert blew overhead. Not too far away from us was the fire. Other than the troops on guard-duty standing off in the distance like trees, everybody else was resting under their blankets. The Earth Dragons were having a nap. Only the horses were makings noises as though they never need rest. I held Luna’s hand underneath the blanket. I looked up and softly lamented: “Truly beautiful.”

Luna giggled softly. She held my hand tightly and responded: "Yeah. It is just like the stars we saw in Gale Village. Your majesty, the stars are always that pretty with you by my side."

"It's not because of me, you know."

"I know....."

Luna leaned herself lightly on me and closed her eyes. She wore a tender smile like the moonlight and in a soft voice requested: "Your majesty, please allow me to lean on you like this for a little while."

"Uhm."

I changed my posture so that Luna could rest comfortably on my shoulder and then shut my eyes too. Did the people who were once by my side look at this dazzling sky of stars like me? I don't know. I can't see them, but I know that the one next to me right now was looking at the starry sky like me.

"Goodnight then, your majesty."

"Goodnight, Luna. We will be able to arrive at the city closest to the desert's five nations tomorrow. We'll have another good rest there."

"Yes, your majesty."

Luna yawned like a miniature rabbit and then shifted her body. We intertwined our fingers and she snored gently in my arms. I breathed in the faint scent on Luna. I listened to the crackling sound of the flame underneath the moon and stars in the night sky as I gradually entered my dreams.

## Ch. 19

The cities in the desert are somewhat different to our cities. If Rosvenor Empire's buildings are new models made by piling up concrete then the cities in the desert would obviously be made from piling up yellow sand. All of the buildings looked like they were covered in a layer of sand. Even the city walls carried the smell of sand on it. We stood atop the sand dune off in the distance and looked at the city far off in the distance. That's the first city of the five

nations, Karnashun. Karnashun is located furthest north, more accurately the area furthest north that has people residing there. The city is the earliest city the Rosvenor Empire came to and also the most convenient for the empire to travel to, thereby also becoming the richest city among the five nations of the desert.

It's morning right now. There are people coming and going from the city in the desert. Everyone wore scarfs and linen capes they wrapped themselves up with similar to us right now. It looks like that's what the residents of the desert wear. Lorana and I looked at the groups of people as we rode atop our horses. She pointed to them and said: "See that, your majesty? Those people are not locals."

"Why not?"

"The sand under the feet of locals of the desert can't possibly be distributed like that. That proves that they rode horses here and are definitely from the north."

Big sis and I both have enhanced senses as elves. I noticed that there was no sand on their heels. There was only sand on the front of their shoes which was sand blown onto their shoes. I nodded and replied: "It looks like this sort of metal is attracting people here non-stop."

"What do you want to do then, your majesty? Send an envoy in and then ask Karashun's master to provide us with sufficient support?"

Luna looked at me and then said: "I think that things would become much convenient if such a group could receive official support."

I thought about it for a bit and then responded: "Switch out my cape with the insignia of the royal family on it, leave the Earth Dragons outside the city, bring in some materials and ammunition, and try not to attract attention. We're mercenaries that come and go, understood? Oh, right, leave most of our people behind to stay outside the city entrance. Everyone else come in with me so that we can support each other from the inside and outside."

"Your majesty?"

"Though it would be really good to have Karnashun's support, as soon as we

reveal ourselves, then our plans will be revealed too. I imagine Socina City's people will catch on soon. What we need to be conscious of right now is to not let others find out we're here because I should be getting lovey-dovey with Lucia in the North right now!"

I stroked Luna's head then looked over in that direction and said: "Of course, communicating with the master of Karnashun is necessary too. However, we need to enter the master's palace covertly."

"Alright."

Lorana nodded and then sent a scout to go and search for the person manning the stables outside the city. After we reached him, I paid him three-times the standard price to get him to look after my Earth Dragons and to be discreet. Then we lined up slowly underneath the city walls to enter the city."

"May I ask who you all are?"

I couldn't understand too well what he was saying because of his dialect, but I had a vague idea. Just as I was going to respond, Loarana pushed me back and then pulled my hoodie down further. She answered the guard: "We are mercenaries. We heard there was meat to eat here so we came over."

"Ah, ah."

The guard immediately lost interest in us. It looks like he's not interested in visiting mercenaries, or might even be sick of them by now. He looked at our weapons and materials, and then we all put down a silver coin deposit. We then entered the city lightly.

"Your majesty, if you don't want to reveal your identity, do not reveal your face. Your wedding attracted the attention of plenty of people. If you reveal your face every time, you'll definitely be recognised. Every king has their 'eyes' just as her majesty has her own 'eyes and ears'."

"Understood."

I nodded. The team walked up along the road. A few kids from the city entrance immediately rushed up to us to recommend their inn and tell us about how good it was. I was surprised they solicit people here. I suddenly felt like I just got off at a train station.

Lorana didn't give anyone her attention. She led us through big and small streets. Karnashun City is much smaller than the royal capital. Its surface area is only as big as one district. However, I could tell that they put in a lot of effort to keep it clean. Horses couldn't kick up dust. The buildings were distributed very neatly and orderly like it was split into two areas, one being the business area and the other being the residential area.

"Your majesty, let's stay here. I stayed here before and I'm very familiar with the owner."

Lorana led us to the front of a hotel. The hotel didn't have a sign at the front. They just hung a silver wild boar sign. We dismounted and entered the yard. The stableman came in to take our horses. I pushed the heavy timber door open and entered the hotel.

It was really dark inside. In the desert, they opened their windows only a tiny bit. Sunlight was blocked out by the loess. The only light inside was the fireplace. An old man at the counter looked up. His squinty eyes looked as though they'd never open. He looked at me and went to speak.

"Boss, let's see..... two ten-person rooms, and two double rooms."

"My, why are you back?" The old man looked at Lorana, paused and then continued, "Didn't you fail the last time you came? Why would you come back for something futile again? Not to mention you brought so many people this time. There's plenty of metal in the world. Why must you be fixated on a mine in legends?"

She laughed and replied: "I've given up. My employer hasn't though. Give us a good deal and I'll come to search for it again. Who knows, I might find it."

"You might, you might. As if." The old man complained a little as he placed a few keys onto the desk and said, "Nobody has been able to find it. Moreover, that sort of stuff can never make you rich. True big money is earned through bloodshed and murder."

He looked at us and then sighed. He said: "You young people love get-rich-overnight things. You're brimming with energy, but how many will return? You young'un's take your life so lightly. Only we old folks want to live as much as a second longer."

“We’ll return alive.” After my simple response, I picked up the keys on the table. I looked at the table that had marks which indicated it had been around for a long time. In a soft yet resolute voice I added, “I’ll make them come back alive.”

## Ch. 20

The lord of Karnashun City’s palace was a bit like the Taj Mahal. The buildings had some religious vibes. It looked bright like it was built with loess. I initially wanted to take the initiative to go and see the lord of Karnashun City, but surprisingly, their envoy had already arrived as soon as we settled down. It was exactly as Lorana said, all kings have their own “eyes and ears”, and it’s not too surprising that the lord caught wind of us so fast given that supposed mercenaries carrying all sorts of weapons had arrived in the city.

But the lord was very smart. The lord was seemingly aware that I didn’t want to cause a commotion and attract attention, thereby sending just a single envoy to invite me into the palace for a meeting. This way I didn’t have to publicise my presence. Nobody noticed me all the way until I entered the palace.

“The lord’s palace is an important place. Weapons are not permitted!”

The door-guard wanted to stop us when he saw Lorana’s sword at her hip. She narrowed her eyes then pressed her hand on her sword and coldly said: “We came because your lord invited us. We came via invitation. There is no way we will hand you our weapons.”

“We are doing this for the safety of our lord!”

The guards held their halberds up to us horizontally without backing down. Lorana looked at them. She then drew her sword and slammed it heavily onto

the ground. She exclaimed: “I’m doing this for the safety of Rosvenor Empire’s prince, his majesty! What are trying to do by aiming your weapons at his majesty?! Are you revolting?!”

The guards jerked their bodies then looked at me with surprise and disbelief. Lorana pulled out the royal family’s coat of arms from her pocket and placed it on a corner of her cape. The two guards were so shocked they turned white as a sheet. Before they could kneel, a fresh and cool laugh came from behind them. It was a female’s laughter that was pleasing to the ear that was like the melodies of birds. I could imagine her beauty before I had seen her.

When the guards heard her laughter, they respectfully moved aside to kneel, thereby revealing the beauty behind them. I looked at her. She had a smooth, flat and small belly underneath her clothes which was made for uniquely with refreshing and cool, a design unique to the desert. Underneath that, she wore a long-silk skirt as thin as a cicada’s wings. I couldn’t take my eyes off her beautiful legs that seemed to be hidden yet exposed at the same time. Her short shirt was tight and ended below her breasts, emphasising her perfect ratios. She scanned us with strong interest through her black veil with her lively and energetic eyes. She had red hair comparable to Lorana’s that looked like a fire in the desert. The jade bracelets on her wrists and ankles jingled. She was like a pearl in this rough ravine-like desert.

“I was afraid and panicked when I heard that you had come here, your majesty. I never thought that there would be another mess here. Your majesty, my two guards do not know better. Please do not blame them.”

I took off my hoodie, looked straight at her and replied: “Not at all. Protecting their lord is a guard’s duty. Not allowing weapons to be brought in is also a rule in the palace. Why do I need to blame these two guards who have done what they should?”

She scanned my face curiously then smiled and said: "You sure are the prince. You are man of striking appearance but also clever and well-mannered. I am the lord of this city, Nara Sobros Bafena. It is a pleasure to meet you, your majesty. I heard that you got married, yet did not come to see you. For that, please allow me to apologise."

"Don't worry about it. You are busy and it's a long journey. I can understand. I am hoping you can look after me during my visit here."

"You need not say that your majesty..... Since you are so straight-forward with me, I shall not hold back either..... But please be mentally prepared as I am not a beautiful woman."

She slowly pulled her veil down, revealing her noble yet pretty and cute face. In that moment I realised that she wasn't wearing a face-veil to keep the sun out but to avoid the eyes of others, but to avoid shocking the world with her beauty.

Luna pinched my back from behind to bring me back to reality from her beauty.

She looked at me and smiled. She then bowed respectfully and said: "Now then, please allow me to warmly receive you, your majesty. You must be tired from your long journey. If you need anything, please allow me to assist you. But for now, please attend the banquet I have prepared for you. You must give me the honour, your majesty."

"Is it alright if I have three people with me?"

She responded with a smile before chuckling softly and replying: “Of course, of course. Even thirty people would be okay. I do not mind this trivial amount of food. Please come through, your majesty.”

The dining customs in the desert are kind of different to ours. They sat a bit like in ancient times, but I wasn’t used to kneeling at all, so I kept shuffling around. However, nobody cared how I sat. The food in the desert is all right, it’s just that the taste is really strong. Same goes for the wine. Everything was intense like the desert.

“So then, your majesty, may I know what you are here for this time?”

Nara put her goblet down and then looked at me with a smile. I lingered for a moment. I never expected her to not beat around the bush. I’m not used to being so straight-forward, but it strangely made me relaxed. I looked at her and replied: “Do you not know already?”

“Haha.” She laughed heartily then shook her head and responded, “What do you want me to say? I do have a guess though. Could it be that you are here for that mysterious mine?”

I placed my goblet of wine down, nodded and replied: “You’re right on the money.”

She paused for a moment and looked at me strangely. She then fiddled with her goblet of wine in her hand as though she was thinking about something. She then said: “Are you lying to me, or are you really here to search for the mine? Your majesty, while your eyes are clear, I cannot see through you.”

Lorana looked at me. I went to speak but she shook her head to stop me from continuing. I didn't want to say anything either since I noticed the overtones in her speech. More explicitly, she knew some things about me but didn't mention them.

When she noticed my gaze, she smiled and waved her hand before saying: "Your majesty, you need not look at me like that. I just casually said it. I am just really surprised. I never thought such rumours would catch you when you are so smart."

I paused for a moment before asking: "Are you sure that it's a rumour?"

"I do not believe there to be anything that I have not seen." She waved her goblet around and looked at me with a smile in her eyes. She then continued, "I consider statements which are not supported with evidence, rumours. I never thought you would make such a long journey here for those rumours. However, your majesty, I have nothing to prove that the mine does not exist either. So shall I wish you good luck?"

I looked at her and directly asked: "Do you know about the mine or not?"

She froze up for a moment then placed her goblet down and went silent for a while as though she was thinking about how to answer. I didn't rush her. I patiently waited for her response.

"I would say that I do not believe the mine exists, but I hope that it does?"

After a long pause, she gently twisted her fingers, looked at me with an odd

smile and softly added, "Your majesty, please come to my room tonight..."

## Ch. 21

Why did Nara tell me to come to her room all of a sudden... and at night for that matter? I feel unsettled. I came here to find out what this is all about. Though I'm a guy, my looks are a very useful weapon nevertheless..... Of course, they're specially used to deal with my two moms. Did Nara call me over to catch me in a sexual trap to blackmail me with it?

I initially wanted to turn her down, but Lorana said I had to go. And so here I am standing in front of the archway. I took in a deep breath and then knocked on the door.

Come what may, I'll shoulder it! Nara is a really pretty female lord after all and she looks just slightly older than me..... Wait, wait, wait, what am I thinking?! There'll be a massive uproar if Nier and Lucia find out.....

"Is that you, your majesty?"

I heard a lazy voice from inside. I gave a plain short response. I then heard footsteps approach the door from inside and then the door opened.

Nara poked her head out, revealing her beautiful face. I was a little disappointed when I saw how she was dressed because she was dressed the same way as in in the morning..... Wait, wait, stop! That's not what's important here. That's not what I'm here for!

She seemed to notice my gaze so she smiled slyly then pulled me into her room by my wrist and slammed the door shut behind her. Her room was decorated in a way that gave off strong vibes of an ethnic-nomadic tribe in the desert. The carpet under my feet was thick and tapestry with odd patterns on them hung on all the walls around. Smoke twirled upwards into the atmosphere from an incense burner. The burner to the side was covered by tapestry. Under the red curtain was a large bed.

This is her room?

But I don't have the chance to check things out anymore because she had me

pressed up against the wall..... Nara wore a sly smile on her face while she had me up against the wall. She reached her finger up to lift my chin and softly asked: "Your majesty, are you perchance... looking forward to something?"

"In what way?"

I struggled to see her face. She's a fair bit shorter than me, but because she lifted my chin up, it wasn't easy to lower my head. I felt like she was dominating me.

Nara laughed in a soft voice and then removed her finger. She pointed at my eyes and said: "Your majesty, please close your eyes for a moment."

"What for? This is your room that I am in right now. How can I guarantee my own safety if I close my eyes?"

"Keep your eyes open then."

Nara looked at me casually and then reached her hand down to her waist and pulled a string, revealing her smooth slender legs which reflected the flames. Before I could scream out, she tossed her shirt aside. The young girl's beautiful body stood before me all of a sudden. Her diamond-like peaks and flat below suddenly appeared before me like a beautiful flower. The unique scent on her body instantly filled the entire room, overwhelming even the smell of the incense.

"Your majesty, please do not yell. The guards are just outside. If they barge in now and see us in this state, what would they think?"

I had swallowed my attempt to yell. Nara spun around in front of me without a single care. She then softly asked: "Your majesty, are you so surprised to see my body? Do you not have two extremely beautiful wives? Why must you act so innocent about a female's body then? You do not need to mind it. Your majesty, if I do not do this, I will not be able keep your attention on me during our conversation, will I?"

"Just say what you want! Hurry up and put your clothes back on!!"

"Hehe, you really are innocent your majesty."

She then pursed her lips into a smile. She didn't put her clothes back on

however. Instead, she sat down on her bed, pointed to the chair by the side and said: "Your majesty, a night rendezvous is always too short, so let us not concern ourselves with minor things like being dressed or undressed. More importantly, I want to talk about the mine. I think you must be concerned about it too, right?"

What do you mean dressed or undressed is a minor matter?! If somebody sees us, no amount of explanations will clear it up! But what she said did catch my attention. I looked at the floor and replied: "Do you know something? Didn't you say you didn't believe it during the day?"

"It is only natural for me to deny my belief in the presence of outsiders. Is that not the same for you, your majesty? You did not want to attract any attention here."

"You mean you sent out a team too?"

"Correct."

She didn't say anything and only answered me seriously. I looked up. I ignored her body for the meantime due to my curiosity in the mine. I looked at her and asked: "So have you found something? Did you locate the mine?"

"No. Up until now, there is only one clue, which is just 'a place with shiny gold'. I have no clues. The one thing that the desert does not lack is shiny gold. I have sent several teams out but have found nothing. However, I can confirm its existence. I can say for sure that it exists."

"Why are you so sure?"

She looked at me seriously and then replied seriously: "Because that person who had the ore definitely did not dig it up by chance. He definitely obtained it from a new mine. Our five nations here acknowledge that fact so that mine definitely exists. However, your majesty, I have personally only searched my territory. My territory. Your majesty, you should know that while our five nations of the desert are on very friendly terms, we will not show mercy when it comes to our territories since we did fight in the past."

"You mean that the mine is not in your territory?"

"Correct." She nodded but then shook her head and continued, "But what I

mean is that the mine is not in the territory of our five nations, not in my territory or in the other four territories. We lords would definitely be able to search and find out if that mine exists in our territory. However, we have not heard news about it from anyone. What does that go to show? It shows that neither of us has located it.”

“So what do you mean?”

“Your majesty, surely you have seen our map. Our territories are laid like a five-corner star with an area in the centre. None of us fight for that territory in the centre to avoid causing long wars. Since the metal mine is not within our territories, it must be there.”

I narrowed my eyes and asked: “Since you know that, why have you not gone there?”

“As I said, we cannot go there in order to maintain the peace between our five nations. That is why proxy-battles are fought there. It is no-man’s land, so no one will get involved regardless of what happens there. It is the bloodiest colosseum.”

She looked at me and chuckled softly. She went on, “I had originally planned to give up but then you came which is the equivalent of a gift from the heavens for me. One glance and I can tell that your team is no pushover. I shall be upfront, I will do everything I can to help you acquire the ore.”

“What do you stand to gain from it?”

I know full well that there is no free meal in this world. I looked at her. She was no longer a beauty in my eyes but the female lord of a city I was negotiating with, a politician.

“What do I gain? Of course I want something from it. Your majesty, as you now know, that is an area we have no right to occupy. However, you can. You just need to acquire the ore then leave refining to me, and I will be able to enter the area on justified grounds.”

She looked at me and extended her hand out toward me. She sincerely said: “Your majesty, consider my suggestion seriously. This matter pertains to decades and even a century of Karnashun’s fate. I can give up anything for the

sake of Karanashun, even if it is my body, soul or life. I will sacrifice anything for Karnashun.”

I looked at her hand and stood up. I walked over to the burner, thought about it silently and then responded: “Nara, let me ask you, what is Karnashun to you?”

“Everything.”

“Yeah?” I then turned around with a smile, grabbed her hand and said, “Let’s work together during this time then! I want the mine, you want the land.”

“Deal!”

We held hands tightly. Nara giggled very softly and then suddenly threw herself at me like a viper in the desert, wrapping herself around me tightly. Before I could yell out, a gentle knock came from the door. Nara used one hand to cover my mouth and the other to yank the door open.....

“Your majesty, the whole night you... ah.....”

Luna’s ice-cold gaze shot over to me.....

“Listen to my explanation! Let me explain!! Luna! Luna!”

“What a beautiful night it is, huh, your majesty.....? Hehe, I am so happy.....”

Luna, don’t go! Don’t go! Listen to my explanation!! It’s not! It’s not what you think! It’s definitely not what you think!!!

## Ch. 22

“Your majesty, you do not need to explain yourself to me since I have no right to stop you from being with any woman.”

“I told you, I wasn’t doing ‘that’. We really were talking business.....”

“Then why would she need to strip?!”

I had no response for that..... I could only grab Luna’s hand tightly so that she wouldn’t run away. Luna didn’t resist me. She just continued walked back to the

hotel. Though she was saying she wasn't angry, I wasn't convinced in the least. But I really don't want to take the blame for this because we really didn't do anything!

Surely Luna is using her jealousy in the wrong place! Elves may be very jealous but they do have their criterion. To be fair, Luna isn't my wife so she shouldn't be getting jealous over me.....

"Luna, you have to believe me. I honestly didn't do anything. You have to believe me. We really only talked business. As for the stripping part. I would never ask a girl I just met to strip. You have to believe me. I can only say that it's one of this city's lord's techniques for negotiations I guess....."

We stood in front of the hotel. Luna listened to my desperate explanation and then sighed heavily. She then said: "I feel like the question is: why are you so foolish when it comes to this sort of stuff? I am not really angry since I have no right to be angry about this, and I know you, your majesty. You are not that sort of person. I can only say that I stood outside all night, yet you did not bother with me, and when I happened to open the door, I saw that scene and therefore pouted a little. So you do not have to explain yourself to me so anxiously. If you want to explain yourself, you should go and explain yourself to Miss Nier and Miss Lucia."

I let out a sigh of relief. I then pressed my hands on Luna's shoulders and nervously asked: "Luna, will you tell Nier and Lucia?"

Luna smirked and replied: "Your majesty, since you don't feel guilty, why would I need to tell Miss Nier and Miss Lucia about it? Were you not discussing business? If you were indeed discussing business, Miss Nier and Miss Lucia would be able to understand you."

"I beg you, please never tell Nier and Lucia....."

"So you were guilty after all!"

"This is about the less trouble the better!! This is... this is....."

Seeing my distressful state, Luna finally couldn't help but smile. She covered her mouth and started giggling. I looked at her hopelessly. She shook her head and said: "It is alright, your majesty. I will not tell Miss Nier and Miss Lucia.

However..... can you hug me? You are seriously..... I already sent you hints, but you still did not understand."

I smiled and pulled Luna into my arms. Luna wrapped her arms around my waist and brushed her head gently on my chest. She then closed her eyes peacefully and gently asked: "Your majesty, you only have me by your side now, so could you treat me the way you treat Miss Nier and Miss Lucia?"

I stroked her back while I held her gently and softly replied: "Only when there is no one around since if the guards caught us..... Ah....."

I felt Luna's arms around me suddenly stiffen up so I turned my head around and saw Lorana holding a paper bag looking at us with interest. When she noticed us looking at her, she waved her hand and brushed it off: "It's alright, just ignore me. I didn't see anything. I don't care about your private life either, your majesty. Inard whom I taught was the same after all, wasn't he?"

"I... I!"

Why am I so unlucky?! I got busted every time I was with a girl today! What, am I supposed to bribe big sis next?!

"Umm.. uhh... we... we....."

I stuttered as I looked for my words. But then Lorana walked over and patted me on my shoulder. She then looked at me with an "I get it" gaze. She said: "It's fine, it's fine, I can understand. I can understand. Luna is gentle and cute after all, plus she's your personal servant. I can understand if sparks fly. But do not get her pregnant, or else..... Lucia will be very angry..... When an elf gets angry about this stuff... they're seriously frightening."

Luna looked at the ground with a lonely look and then muttered: "I won't. I cannot have children. His majesty is aware of this. I also have no plans of becoming part of his majesty's family. His majesty is both my saviour and my reason to live. I will do anything for his majesty no matter what the cost."

I looked at Luna but didn't know what to say. I sympathised with Luna. My feelings for Luna are so complicated I don't know how to describe them properly either. I'd be lying if I said I don't like her, but I don't have a desire to marry her. But then my feelings for Luna aren't the same as my feelings for

Freya.

I don't know what my feelings for her are myself. I just want to keep her by my side forever. I don't want to let her go.

"Is that right.....?" Lorana paused for a bit then looked up at the sky and said, "The guards are going to get up any moment now. Your majesty, you two go on back first. The lord must have told you something last night, right? Let's talk about the details in your room."

Luna and I broke up. Luna patted her clothes. Lorana walked into the hotel. I turned my head around to look at Luna. I stretched my hand out and said: "Let's go, Luna. Let's head back."

Luna froze up for a second and then nodded before wiping the corners of her eyes. She took my hand and with a smile said: "Alright, your majesty. Let us head back."

When we returned to my room, Lorana had a very simple breakfast ready. I had an apple for breakfast while she had her breakfast next to me. She listened to me recount the meeting with the lord, but for the sake of making it sound reasonable and believable, I left out the part about her stripping.

"I see..... This is no longer about searching for the mine anymore." Lorana then did some thinking to herself and then elaborated, "Your majesty, it looks like everyone knows where the mine is. Since the lords would be know more about their territories than anyone else, it's impossible for them to not know such a mine appeared in their territory. So it must be in that no-man's land area. If that's the case, we've narrowed down the search perimeter a fair bit. However, that also means that it's going to be a death match."

"Yeah."

I nodded. A sea and sky of sand, bloodthirsty jackals and people who are putting their life on the line for wealth. It's essentially the arena for a game of death. I don't know how bloody and terrifying it is in there. I believe that humanity's character will be tested to the max in that lawless area with no one managing it.

It will be a man-made hell in there.

But even if it is hell, I'll cross the sea and sky of sand because I'm the same as them. I'm here to put my life on the line for that mine. I have no reason to be afraid or turn tail because we have the same thing to gain. Hence, I shall eliminate everyone in my way.

## Ch. 23

"Princess. Princess." Nier turned around with a frown. This is the backyard of the palace. Normally, nobody should be entering this area, but somebody was calling out to her from behind. The two Valkyries from behind her drew their swords. Nier waved her hand. She looked at the young guy who wore a flattering smile and tilted her head. Her green eyes were void of emotion. She coldly said to him: "I remember you a somewhat. You're the one guy from last time... Oubacher, right?"

"Yes, yes. Thank you for remembering me princess."

He revealed a smile and walked forward. The Valkyries swiftly held their swords up to his neck. Nier looked at him with a cold gaze and said: "I don't care who you are. This is the royal family's backyard. What right do you have to be here?"

"Umm, my father is discussing business with her majesty. Her majesty had me come here to take a rest, so I followed the scent of flowers and found you. You really are more beautiful than flowers. You truly are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

He snickered mischievously as he looked at the swords the Valkyries had at his neck. He wasn't afraid at all. Nier frowned. It looks like this guy is just scum. He sure is the rich type with power. It would cause trouble if the Valkyries were to kill him here.

She waved her hand and the Valkyries put their swords down. She snorted and waved her hand again. With her back facing him she said: "Aside from the fact that you're one who is unaccountably solicitous, you won't get anything from me. You didn't give me a good impression of you last time, so leave if you

have no business here. You were told to rest, not to come and compliment me.”

“Don’t say that, princess. I heard... his majesty is not here at the moment.”

He wore a haughty smile as he approached her, right up to her back. Nier’s eyebrows twitched when she heard “his majesty”. She looked a little sad but he didn’t see it. She turned her head around to look at him and exclaimed: “You’re not qualified to know where his majesty is!”

“Princess, I also heard that his majesty went north to the elves to accompany his other princess..... How pitiable, princess. You are so beautiful and carry his child, yet he is wasting such a beauty. Do you not hate that? You love his majesty so much, but it does not look like he cherishes your love.”

The corner of Nier’s mouth twitched but she didn’t respond. She instead looked at the small creek in front in front of her and spaced out. The guy thought he hit the nail on its head so he came closer to her and placed his head gently on Nier’s shoulder. Next to her ear, he whispered: “Princess, forget that prince. He is but just a kid hiding behind his mom’s back. His time to show off will soon be over..... He is not fit for your precious love and beauty like that of a precious gem. He actually went and got a second princess. You too have the right.....”

He couldn’t finish his sentence, not because he couldn’t think of what to say but because Nier was strangling his neck. His handsome face had frozen up as a face of terror. In front of him was Nier’s cold expression that was virtually cold as ice. Nier’s fingers were tightened around his throat like a tiger’s paws, virtually as though she was going to snap his neck.

“I won’t allow anyone to insult his majesty. I said that before, but it looks like you didn’t learn your lesson. I won’t let anyone disparage my love for his majesty. You don’t understand our love. You insulted his majesty, questioned our love, and tried to seduce me, the princess. That’s three crimes I need to punish you for. I’ll turn this useless head of yours into a ball to kick around right now!”

His throat started cracking and his eyes looked like they were going to burst out of his eyes. He was able to smile haughtily when he had swords up against his neck, but he could see the death-god in Nier’s eyes right now as she

strangled his neck.

He felt death looming over him for the first time. Actually, it was no longer just looming over him. Nier truly wanted to kill him. She had no intention of giving him a chance to plead.

“Princess! Calm down! Calm down! Calm down! If you want to kill him, leave it to us!! Princess! Princess, do not get so angry!”

The Valkyries next to her were so shocked they went pale. They quickly grabbed Nier’s arm and desperately tried to get her to let go. Nier spat and then said: “Get lost! I’m your instructor! I don’t need your concern!”

“Princess! The most important thing is that you are carrying his majesty’s child right now! If you get angry and cause problems for your child, how will we explain ourselves to her majesty and his majesty?!”

Nier’s expression relaxed a little when they mentioned her child and his majesty. She let go and he really did drop onto the ground limp. It took him some time to catch his breath. He covered his neck and curled up like a prawn as he trembled. Nier stared at him with her cold gaze, stepped onto his face with one foot and told him: “Consider yourself lucky. I was once the Valkyries’ sword instructor. If I was armed right now, I would’ve impaled several holes in your heart by now. Do not insult his majesty in front of me and do not question my love. If you don’t wish to die, get lost as fast as your legs take you!”

A Valkyrie dragged his powerless body out. The other Valkyrie hesitated for a moment and looked at Nier with concern. She softly said: “Instr-... I mean... princess, if that man was telling the truth, his majesty is too much, since you have his child after all.....”

Nier turned around and looked at the small creek again. She softly explained: “No, his majesty hasn’t done anything wrong. His majesty didn’t go to the elves. He went to do something he wanted to do. His majesty didn’t leave me behind. He discussed it with me before choosing to go. I know that, that’s why I don’t blame his majesty. I have nothing to blame him for.”

“Really? ..... I shall say no more then. I just hope that things work out over there for his majesty.”

The Valkyrie looked at Nier and then returned to her vigilant mode. Nier had her back facing her. She looked at the ring on her ring tenderly, changing her emotionless gaze into a tender and affectionate one. A moment later, she turned around and sounding slightly tired said: “Let’s head back. I want to have a bit of a rest.”

“Roger!”

I was currently making my final preparations at Karnashun City.

I don’t intend to stay in this city for long. Right now, time is of the essence. Since the location has been narrowed down for everyone it’s of utmost importance to get ahead of the others. It’s not a large area, but it’s not small either. If i leave a day earlier, I’ll have another day ahead to find what I want.

Of course, the location of the mine isn’t all I need. I need to find people who can refine the mineral and the refinement method. I’m entrusting Nara with that.

I have detailed information now, so the next step is to act upon it.

## Glossary

\*Oubacher is pronounced “Ou-ba-ka”, for those who know Jap, Ou = Big, Baka = Idiot. Put the two together and you get what he is.

## Ch. 24

“My, your majesty, are you heading out already? You really are an action-taker. I might not have been able to see you one last time if I had woken up later.”

I looked at Nara who was in front of me, smiled and said: “Don’t say something so scary. We’ve lost two days already. Thank you for taking care of us the last two days, Lord Nara. Time is of the essence for us now.”

Nara smiled and responded: “Yes, your majesty. Your majesty, you must pay attention to something. Though the four other nations have not been explicit about it they have surely sent out their own teams. Nobody is your friend in

that place with no one managing it. You are the team I am sending out. You will be watched as soon as you leave the city. Therefore, be cautious. I do not want my dream to end before it starts.”

“It’s not just your dream alone. It’s my dream too, so I won’t let it end so soon.”

“Yeah? You sure let me feel reassured. I am reassured. I have prepared several things to allow you to be more comfortable.”

She waved her hand and a young man came up from behind. He had really tanned skinned, a common trait of those living in the desert. Maybe it was more a chocolate colour? Beneath his slightly curly hair was a pair of very clear eyes like stars in the desert. Though his skin was a little dark, they didn’t hide his refreshing facial features. His lean and competent appearance made him seem like he was made from the same mould as Castell.

Could it be that you lords all like this sort of guy?!

“This is my childhood friend who is also in charge of the imperial guards, Military Official Tarak Suofurisk.” Nara pinched his face and smiled. Her reserved nature and dignity reduced a little as she revealed a playful nature young girls have which gave off the comfy feeling between childhood friends.

“Y-Your majesty! It is an honour to meet you!”

He wore a stern look and gave me a big bow. Stiff like a toy-soldier, his relatively handsome face now looked distorted. I smiled and patted him on his shoulder. I asked: “It’s alright, you don’t need to be nervous. I am the prince, but I’m also human, so you don’t need to be so nervous. Well then, Lord Nara, are you giving me this young man as a gift or something?”

With a smile, Nara said: “Of course not. Your majesty, I would not give him to you even if you wanted him. He is my childhood friend. We are very friendly with each other. If I was not the lord of the city, I might have had a few cute kids with him already.”

“Nara!”

Tarak scolded her with a red face. Nara giggled softly. I looked at Nara’s eyes. She wasn’t joking. The way she looked at Tarak certainly had the same feeling

as the way Nier looked at me. That strong hint of love can't be false. However, she stripped down completely in front of me that night. It looks like she is very determined to achieve her dream and to serve her city, to the point that she was willing to abandon her love as well.

"Alright now. His majesty just said it too. Time is everything right now. I shall not waste anymore of your time, your majesty." Nara wore her serious expression again. She then took a parchment from Tarak and put it in my hand. With that she said, "Before you came here, I had sent out enough teams to gather information except I did not get anything from it. This is a map I drew. I can promise it is accurate. You will not get lost in that area with this map."

I nodded and then opened the map. There were a few red areas on the map. Nara pointed and said: "These are the places my people have checked. If you pass those zones, you will see marks they left behind when setting up camp. Those are zones where you can avoid the wind and are comfortable. You must seek shelter at these places when resting at night. Otherwise, a sandstorm may swallow up your entire team at any moment."

"Alright, thank you for giving me something so important."

I nodded and put it away carefully. A map is the most important item for any foreign group, especially when I'm heading into an area I've never been too with nobody there. This map is more important than anything right now. Now that I have a map, I'll be able to further narrow down the perimeter I have to search, which also means that I have a greater chance of locating it.

Nara pushed Tarak over to me and while smiling said: "Also, there is Tarak. But I am just lending him to you. You must remember to return him to me, your majesty. Tarak is a professional at living in the desert and he has searched for that sort of metal twice so you could say that he is very familiar with that area. Further, Tarak he is good at communicating with local residents and others. And as the military officer in charge of protecting me, he is an expert swordsman. I therefore believe that he is the most valuable asset there."

"He's that incredible?!"

I looked at Tarak astounded. I never thought the young man was so incredible. He looked around the same age as me. They sure were right when

they said “young people can make great heroes”. But when I look at Tarak, I have an odd feeling of humiliation and jealousy. We’re clearly about the same age yet he’s so accomplished at many things while I still need to depend on the people around me.

“You flatter me, your majesty. I am but just a military officer. I shall be responsible for guiding you and keeping you safe for the coming journey. I hope you can achieve your wish and of course, Lord Nara’s wish.”

Tarak bowed and then raised his head with a straight-face. I nodded and then responded: “Alright. We shall join hands with sincerity for this journey, since this isn’t just about me but also Lord Nara.”

“That will be all then. Please do not be displeased with the minimal support I have offered. Considering the set-up of your team, do you not feel this combination is perfect?”

“It is. Thank you, Lord Nara. I believe that this will be a very simple job thanks to what you have provided me with.”

Nara nodded. She then grabbed hold of Tarak and told him: “While you have said that you are tight on time, you do have time for me to say a few words with Tarak, do you not, your majesty.....? If you would permit it, please allow me to bid Tarak farewell.”

“That’s fine.”

I nodded and then watched them leave my sight. Lorana looked over in their direction with curiosity, sighed and said: “Those two... poor them.”

I nodded and said: “Yeah. They clearly love each other yet can’t be together. There is no one forcing them nor is there any power stopping them, but they have chosen to not be together. That sort of love is admirably but also pitiable.”

“Yeah, just like Elizabeth. Actually, no. Elizabeth isn’t that sort of person. Elizabeth is the type who could sacrifice everything for her love. Honestly, a woman who could betray herself for her city is truly admirable but also pitiable.”

“I think Tarak is the pitiful one. He clearly loves her yet they bound to never be together. But even so, he has chosen to always stay by her side. I actually

admire and respect him for that.”

“The woman he loves married herself to Karnashun City after all.....”

## Ch. 25

I didn’t directly ask Tarak what he spoke with Nara about after we left Karnashun. It’s fair to say that it’s their secret. Lorana seemed to really enjoy teasing him though since she’s carefree sort of character, so she’s always really interested in Tarak who’s straight-laced. Maybe I should say... she found herself a really fun toy to mess with. Lorana dressed as she pleased in the desert. The most unacceptable part though was her butt was exposed underneath her cloak. She’d deliberately bend forwards or face her back to Tarak causing the straight-laced guy to not know where to look.

Lorana looked at Tarak who was next to her and asked with a smile: “Man, Tarak, why don’t you confess to Nara? You can clearly see her feelings for you, can’t you? You’re handsome and she’s beautiful. You two make a good couple. Why do you let yourself get hung up over this and that? Wouldn’t all be well if you two just got together? You’re not young anymore either, so shouldn’t you get married?”

Tarak pulled on the rope, blushed and replied: “It’s our private business!”

Lorana frowned. She looked at the straight-laced Tarak as though she was the voice of reason and said: “But aren’t we companions now? We’re companions who can trust each other with our lives, yet you won’t even tell us about your feelings? That makes it difficult for us to trust you to help us when we’re in a pinch.”

“Of course you can trust me! I took on this mission, so I will protect his majesty even if it costs me my life.” Tarak looked at us anxiously. He was on the verge of going down on his knees to express his loyalty. I waved my hand with a smile to indicate that I wasn’t going to get involved with their conversation and to not drag me into it.

“Are you going to tell me about your romance then? When we travel or when

we camp, we all share our love stories to fight the loneliness. You didn't know that as a soldier? Can't you tell we all really care about your love? Shouldn't you share it with us? We're not going to laugh about you and Miss Nara. It's hard for us to view you as a comrade if you're not willing to share this sort of stuff when we're in the same camp."

Tarak froze up and looked at me a little fearfully. It appears he wants me to help him out. I smiled helplessly, tilted my head and asked Luna for the water, pretending I didn't see anything. Sorry Tarak. It won't be any fun if I help you out. To be honest, I'm really interested in your love story too.

"Well... well... umm....."

Tarak noticed I wasn't paying attention so he looked at Lorana and got a little flustered. The guards around went closer to him too, though I can't say for sure if that was deliberate or not. It looks like everyone is interested in the love story of the handsome young man and the beautiful lord. We were currently on a peaceful and steady road so we weren't too concerned about a threat.

"We... we are childhood friends..... I liked Nara since I was a young." Tarak had no way of shaking off the interested soldiers around him so he began to speak. Lorana listened in closely. Even Luna who was pouring me water hesitated for a moment.

I looked at Luna and quietly asked: "Want's wrong? You want to listen?"

Luna jolted her body because I scared her by suddenly talking to her. She quickly shook her head and replied: "No... It is just... it is just....."

I took the water in her hand, smiled and said to her: "Go and listen if you want to. I'm honestly very interested too since I'm curious myself. Love stories always attract people no matter where you are after all, Luna."

Luna giggled softly and grabbed my hand holding the water. She shook her head and replied: "Not really, your majesty. I actually want to write my own love story more than listening to the love story of other's, since listening to their stories makes me recall my past which makes me very sad."

I stroked Luna's head. Those who have gone through unfortunate things always feel really sad when they listen to blissful and happy stories. I secretly

touched her hand, then turned around and said: "Let me go next to you then. Let us listen in together. I'm really curious."

Luna looked at me and revealed a blissful smile. She then gave me a gentle nod.

I looked at Tarak behind me. Tarak looked at the people around him. It looks like he can't hold himself back after starting. With a shy smile he told us, "We commonly played together when we were young. At that time, she said she liked the sort of prince that was skilled at martial arts and protected the princess, so I went to learn swordsmanship. I learnt swordplay from countless people, did countless things for her, and put in so much blood, sweat and tears for her. I don't regret it. I got to watch her put one foot in front of the other over and over to walk the path she wanted to walk. She never was a lovey-dovey girl. She viewed the empress as her ideal, a strong woman who forged forth regardless of circumstances. She was as bright as the sun. She was the one I wanted to chase after. I've always loved her, but I don't want to possess her. I just want to stay by her side. There is nothing more blissful than that to me. I try so hard because I want to have the right to stand by her."

"I see. You're a brave one, kid."

After listening to his story, Lorana patted him on his shoulder so hard he nearly fell off his horse. Tarak forced a smile and said: "What does courage have to do with this.....?"

"Of course it's related. To be able to love a woman and stay by her side knowing you won't end up together requires an extraordinary amount of courage. Nara loves you too, that we understand. But she chose to marry herself to Karnashun City. That makes her an outstanding lord."

"That's right! Nara is very noble! I believe that she is already qualified to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the empress!"

"You could say that, but Elizabeth isn't the type who would sever bonds to the degree Nara does since she has a husband after all."

"What?! Her majesty has a husband?! Who is he?"

Tarak reacted like he was scared by someone. He looked at Lorana and me

with incomparable astonishment. I looked at him hopelessly and asked: "How would I exist if mom didn't get married? You don't know that?!"

"So in other words, Elizabeth has a husband?! So the person Nara respects and admires most did get married! That means that Nara can get married as well then!"

"Nobody ever stopped you two. Love and careers are two separate things. Wouldn't it be better if you two managed the nation together?"

I turned back to look forwards feeling hopeless. Just when everyone was laughing loudly, a group of carriages came over with a mighty aura from up ahead. I think it's a merchant group.

Their flag standing upright indicated they were an escort, I mean, merchant group of Rosvenor Empire.

There's something really odd with that group. They're evidently a private merchant group yet they dared to use the royal family's flag. Could they be Castell's merchant group?

The group didn't care about us though. They passed by us as quick as they could. I looked at the group. Every single one of them covered their faces with head-cloths and scarfs. Only their eyes were visible.

Once they passed us, Lorana whispered in my ear: "Your majesty, that group is very, very odd."

I tugged my scarf and asked: "What's wrong? It's normal to be dressed like that in the desert, isn't it?"

"No..... They're the royal family's merchant group, yet they didn't recognise you. That proves that there's a problem..... But I'm not sure... what the problem is. However... mm... they shouldn't be an issue for us for right now."

## Ch. 26

The first day of the journey was considerably relaxing since we went through uninhabited areas. We finally reached a small town today. This is a small town

at the edge of the desert with very few people here. The people became quite noisy when we passed through. There were only two hotels in the small town. After settling the people around me, I had the remaining soldiers set up camp outside the town. And as our regulations dictate, they were not to disturb or harass the inhabitants.

Not many people were able to stay around me. Luna and I shared a room, Lorana and Shusia shared a room, and then Tarak stayed with his roommate, Philes.

Shusia is a really cute girl. Among the domineering and brutal Valkyries, the girl was always smiling which was a rare sight among them. It didn't feel like Nier and Shusia came from the same unit considering the way Nier stared at me coldly at first while Shusia was smiling. Her name, Shusia is full of respect and admiration for Nier. Nier was an instructor that was very deserving of her respect from Shusia's point of view.

Shusia is a little shorter than Nier, but her sword skills were excellent. According to Nier however, innate talent for swordsmanship is a very important component of it. While Shusia has lots of talent, she was not as talented as Nier because Nier was five levels above her. She had longer reach and more explosive power than Shusia. Those were innate factors that couldn't be trained, so a true sword master was rare to come by every century. However, Shusia had great perception and comprehension skills.

Among the new Valkyries, she was like the Valkyries back then, diligent and not afraid of hard work. Nier had a very positive evaluation of her and she was the new sword instructor after Nier left.

Shusia is very friendly with me. I think it was more like worshipping me. According to her, I created a huge uproar among the Valkyries since I was able to turn Nier into an obedient and gentle princess. After the development between Nier and me, the Valkyries weren't so vigilant of me anymore and it made some of the younger Valkyries desire love.....

But because of that, Alice has been complaining daily that the Valkyries are difficult to lead. I have to bear some of the some responsibility there.....

"Your majesty, the other team-members have finished setting up camp and

are preparing to turn in.”

I nodded. I looked at Shusia who was in her Valkyrie uniform, smiled and said: “Alright. Thank you for your hard work, Shuhia. It’s late now so you should go and rest too. We need to wake up early to get moving.”

“Understood. Goodnight, your majesty.” Shusia made a small bow then looked up at me. She hesitated for a moment then asked, “Your majesty, I have not seen Instructor N-..... I mean, the princess! I have not seen the princess in a long time. I wonder how she is doing, you.....”

“Ah, I think Nier likes being called ‘instructor’ more.” I smiled and shook my head. I then went on, “Nier is very well, at least she was before I left. Nier is very careful with her health nowadays so I don’t think anything will happen to her.”

“Th-Then what about Instructor Nier being pregnant.....?”

“You only just heard it? I thought everybody knew already, at least I thought everyone in my guard-unit knew already, since I had you become the instructor after she got pregnant.”

Shusia’s eyes are round as a cat’s. She looked at me surprised and covered her mouth. Stunned, she said: “Wh-What?! I... I can’t tell at all. I didn’t believe she was pregnant when she told me since her belly wasn’t larger.....”

I forehead-palmed myself help hopelessly. I’ve just remember the Valkyries basically lack common sense. Nier wasn’t that stupid though. It looks like she’s less of a woman of the world than Nier: “Of course not! Nier has only just gotten pregnant, so her belly naturally won’t be that big. But she is without question pregnant..... Wait, we don’t need to talk about her anymore. What’s happening with you and Philes now?”

Shusia’s expression stiffened up. I looked at her face that was getting redder and redder like a boiled prawn and smiled. It looked like her body temperature was increasing too. With a smile I said: “Didn’t you two ask Tarak lots of question about love today? As Big sis said, if you don’t even tell us about your love, we’ll feel restless.”

“We... we... our... mm... we envy you and Instructor Nier a little..... We... we

considered life after marriage..... But when we looked at the cost of housing outside the royal capital... the houses were honestly too expensive... erm.... umm..... No! No! We are not saying that you don't treat us well, it's just... I have never had a salary.....”

I nodded. I'm aware that the Valkyries don't have a salary. If I wasn't the prince, I would have to cover all our expenses if Nier and I got married. I'm sure that life is very tough for Philes and Shusia since while Philes has a good salary, it's not easy to live in the royal capital.

“Don't you two worry.”

I stood up and touched her head. I then walked up to the window and looked at the desert. It was still bright outside when it was already very late. I said: “Be with each other and don't worry. When you're ready to get married, I'll cover your wedding fees and pay for your home. If you two want, you can live in the palace as well.”

“Your majesty!”

“Don't be so happy, Shusia.” I looked at her moved expression with tears brimming in her eyes and smiled. I then leaned on the wall and explained, “Loyalty cannot be bought with money, but true loyalty is worth lots. You two stay by my side to protect me. Your loyalty is worth me repaying.”

Shusia thanked me over and over before leaving my room. I sat for a while before Luna came in. She smiled when she saw me and said: “Your majesty, are you still not sleeping? I have checked our stuff and our expenditure is reasonable.”

“Thanks, Luna.”

Luna shook her head. She then looked at me with a smile and responded: “But your majesty, if I could get married too, would you prepare a house for me in the royal capital as well.....? Forget it, I was joking. I have thought it over carefully. I only have you by my side... and I can only be with you, your majesty.”

I hugged Luna gently and then softly asked her: “Luna... do you not like being by my side.....?”

Luna snuggled up in my arms and with a smile replied: "No... I feel very blissful... very, very blissful. I am happy as long as I can be with you, your majesty....."

I nodded then kissed her pointy ears and said: "Did you know, Luna? I was a little moved by what I heard Tarak say today. I really admire and respect him. I really do. I want to be like Tarak too, being able to put everything on the line for my love. I want to gradually become stronger for my loved one..... I feel like he is a happy person. Honest. Very happy."

"So then your majesty... am I included... among the people you are gradually becoming for?"

Luna looked up in my arms. She clasped my face gently with her hands. Her eyes carried a tinge of sadness and love as she looked me meekly.

I lowered my head gently.....

Luna went up on her toes.....

## Ch. 27

"You mean that group of merchants is very weird?"

Lorana nodded. She looked at me and, in a serious tone, explained, "Your Majesty, I investigated that group of merchants, in a low-key way, because they must have rested in this small town before they could continue. Therefore, that group definitely rested up here. There are also only two hotels here, so they rested here for sure."

"Do you know what they bought? They purchased metal that can be used to manufacture guns. The metal is Rosvenor Empire's. In other words, the goods that Castell is in charge of trading. Purchasing it privately is prohibited."

I folded my arms, and while looking at her, said, "So they're Castell's men, then. Their logo and flag were the royal family's. Nobody would dare to use that sort of stuff other than Castell. They'd all lose their heads when they enter the Rosvenor Empire. Further, Castell's merchant group's logo and the royal flag is

made by the royal family itself. Nobody else could make that pattern.”

“Yes, that’s why there’s a problem with that group.”

I placed my hand on my forehead. I looked at Lorana, who was serious and knocking on the table.

*‘She came here and woke me in the middle of the night, so here I was thinking something came up. But it was about the group of merchants who passed us during the day. I got called awake while still in my pyjamas. I’m still a little dizzy, right now. I really don’t want to do any more thinking.’*

Lorana looked at me and sternly said, “It’s dangerous no matter how you think about it. Your Majesty, think about it carefully. If the group weren’t Castell’s men, they could get changed into their regular clothes, once they get back. They could then transport the metal, that can be used to make guns and cannons, to a secret location to manufacture weapons. What would they be doing that for?! They’re preparing to revolt! I don’t know what weapons they’re making privately, or what they’re thinking. If they’re Castell’s men, then their business can be considered legal. But they didn’t even greet you when they saw you!! In front of them was the Prince of the Rosvenor Empire, and they just continued to pass like that?”

“It’s not impossible to comprehend why, though, right? Not everyone recognises me, after all... Some people don’t recognise me. I didn’t display the royal family’s coat of arms or flag either, so it’s normal for them not to greet me, isn’t it?”

“No, Your Majesty, don’t you think you’re famous enough? Look at the Valkyries. They basically don’t leave the palace and don’t concern themselves with other’s business. But the Valkyries all know about you. They can all recognise you, now, even if they haven’t met you.”

I hesitated for a moment and then asked, “But the Valkyries are the royal family’s guard unit, so they would have to know about me now, right...? This is unrelated, isn’t it? As for the merchants, it’s possible they don’t recognise me. I don’t feel that there’s a problem. Are you thinking too much?”

Lorana sternly raised her voice, “You’re not vigilant enough!”

I quickly leaned over to cover her mouth. I pointed at Luna, who was sleeping behind me, and said, “Ssshh, don’t wake Luna. She has just fallen asleep.”

Lorana rolled her eyes and then said, “Fine, fine, fine. Do you think it makes sense for the royal family’s merchants to not recognise their own master? Nobody is better at acquiring inside information than merchants. If they saw you here, they would announce themselves, no matter what. That way, you would keep them in mind once Castell quits, but they just passed by without a greeting.”

“Don’t you think that’s where the biggest problem lies? Why didn’t they greet you? It’s either because they have no respect for you or don’t think you’ll be alive for long enough to become their master, or they’re not merchants. Castell tacitly consented to them buying that stuff in his name, which means that Castell wants to revolt!”

I chuckled hopelessly.

If I wasn’t being considerate of Luna behind me, I really would’ve laughed loudly.

Lorana waited for me to finish chuckling. She then revealed a somewhat angry expression.

I shook my head and replied, “I’m used to not being respected. I want to win other’s respect through my own efforts. Castell couldn’t possibly revolt. Anybody but Castell could revolt.”

“Why are you so confident? Don’t tell me you think Castell considers himself your vassal now, after helping you with a few things. Castell’s loyalty isn’t that easy to obtain. Didn’t you yourself say ‘loyalty can’t be bought with money, but true loyalty is a treasure’? Castell’s loyalty is extremely hard to obtain!”

“I always knew Castell wasn’t loyal to me. But I know that he’s loyal to Mom. Loyal to death, for that matter. So how could he revolt?”

There’s no room to question Castell’s loyalty to Elizabeth. He’s more loyal than even the Valkyries. If that wasn’t the case, the empress wouldn’t give him the right to enter her room as he pleased. As her personal vassal, he was her most loyal existence.

“That’s exactly why!” Lorana slammed her hand on the table, giving me a fright and almost causing me to jump up.

Luna groaned gently.

I then quickly calmed my breathing down and looked at Lorana like I was scolding her.

Lorana waved her hand nonchalantly to express her apology. She then quietly, yet sternly, said, “Your Majesty, you have to know that being loyal to Elizabeth doesn’t mean being loyal to you. They could throw away their lives for Elizabeth, so they could take your head for her all the same.”

I nearly burst out in laughter.

There’s no way Elizabeth would order my head to be taken. Anybody could kill me, but my two moms would never. They could take the heads of countless others to protect me, so how could they want me dead?

If Castell was loyal to Elizabeth, he would be loyal to me, because Elizabeth and I were bound together and could not be separated.

“Your Majesty, do not go thinking that because you are the prince and Elizabeth’s beloved child, they won’t try anything against you. Instead, you could say that they consider you a threat to Her Majesty’s rule.”

“You can say that you have no ambitions, with its implied pejorative nature, and that the empress trusts you without question, however; those schemers don’t believe that. They don’t stand on Elizabeth’s side or yours! They will go behind Elizabeth to eliminate you, and even consider that a merit!”

“That...”

Lorana looked at me sternly and added, “Your Majesty, you must have your own faction, and you must separate your faction from the empress’ faction. You two are close, and you have no walls between you, but your people definitely don’t think the same way. You must keep a watch on what Her Majesty’s people are doing, for your own safety.”

“You have to realise that the empress’ people are definitely not loyal to you. They don’t feel consoled, or relieved, to know that you have great ambitions,

for they view it as a wild ambition... Those loyal to the empress, to death, can't possibly let you move freely when they consider your ambition. You must bear this in mind. And that merchant group must be investigated thoroughly!"

## Ch. 28

I didn't sleep well last night, not because Lorana woke me up, but it did have to do with her.

What she said had sent a cold chill up my spine, at the end. I always thought that Elizabeth's people should also be loyal to me. At least that was the case with Nier. At least she wouldn't hurt me.

But then I realised that, at the time, it wasn't that she wouldn't harm me, but that she was under orders to protect me, which is why she didn't harm me. When we first met and she said to me 'please kill yourself,' she was being sincere.

Nier really disliked me at the start.

Although I feel bad towards the current Nier, there's still a wall between us because her 'please kill yourself' request had hurt me.

If Nier was like that, then the others wouldn't suddenly like me more.

Needless to say, the Valkyries most certainly didn't. They disliked me for a number of different reasons.

I don't see an issue with Castell, but as for Alice... a strange gut feeling makes me very vigilant of her.

So, indeed, those in the empress' faction were very vigilant of me, and it's safe to assume that they're even more vigilant after the banquet I had held. I had forgotten about the fact that I was the next emperor.

No, that's not what I forgot. What I truly forgot was what I should do as the next emperor.

If I become the emperor, then those in the empress' faction will lose power. As her trusted vassals and servants, I have to get rid of them. I can't allow other opposing powers to exist around me as the emperor. When the time comes, the people around me will definitely be Nier, Lucia, Castell and my personal guard unit.

But that's not all.

At present, I am nurturing my own powers. Yes, I have no intention of contending for the throne, and Mom isn't afraid or suspicious of me, but her people don't think the same way. Mom views me as her child, while they view me as a contender for the throne. Since they are loyal to the empress, they have to be vigilant of me.

Thus, what Lorana said was correct. It was my first time realising that humanity's political structure dictated that they would take action for their own loyalty, despite the likelihood of Mom and me harming each other not existing.

Luna placed my breakfast in front of me, then looked at my face, frowned and asked, "Your Majesty, you do not look too well... How about we rest for one more day? Your Majesty, your face is very pale. It will be most dangerous if you get sick on the road. Your Majesty, are you ill, at the moment?"

*'I'm fine physically, just a little tired. Mentally, I took a heavy blow, though...'*

I shook my head and replied, "I'm alright, Luna, you don't need to worry about me. I'm fine. Time is precious. I have no time to stop here. Oh, Luna, give me pen and paper."

"Ah... oh... pen and paper." Luna hesitated for a moment, but then quickly grabbed a pen and paper from the side. She placed it before me and I swiftly wrote down my orders while Luna quickly heated up the stamp.

I stamped my orders once I was done writing and then placed it aside.

Luna picked up the letter and asked, "Your Majesty, where do you want this letter sent to?"

"Tell a soldier to send it to the royal capital... wait... no... I can't send it to the royal capital."

While that goods carriage was definitely headed to the royal capital, my orders held no weight in the royal capital. The empress was too far away. She couldn't do much to them from there. The empress was absent and so was I.

If Castell sides against me, not only will my order be ineffective, but I'll have alerted the enemy, too.

"Send it to Troy City and hand it to Her Majesty."

It's best to inform Her Majesty about this sort of stuff since it involves both of us. I'm confident that the empress never gave any order to harm me. If Castell is the mastermind, he's definitely proceeding secretly. All his schemes will be halted if Her Majesty finds out about this.

I'm not going to stop my journey here because of this. I want to become a qualified king. If I stop because of this kind of threat, or because there's danger lurking, then wouldn't I have let Mera, who I ran a sword through, down? My courage isn't limited to just killing someone. I can eliminate all dangers until there are no more.

I think this matter involves Her Majesty. However, I don't have any plans to use this opportunity to eliminate people from the empress' faction, as that would prompt conflict. At present, we can at least maintain peace between our factions.

Humanity's situation is completely different to the situation with the elves. On the elven side, there's only one faction, but with humanity, we're keeping each other in check, and trying to maintain a balance of power.

I couldn't instigate conflict. Hence, I could only tell Elizabeth that Castell's merchants didn't salute me when they met me on the road and mention their cargo.

I think Elizabeth would understand what I was getting at, given how smart she is, and she would also know what to do on her end.

"Alright. Luna, we won't have to worry anymore, now." I sighed a breath of relief and started eating my breakfast.

Luna hesitated for a moment then questioned me, "Are you worried about what Miss Lorana said last night?"

"We woke you? Sorry, Luna."

"No..." Luna shook her head, then looked at me with a nervous expression. In a slightly concerned tone, she said, "I agree with what she said. Your Majesty, did you write the letter just now to sort this out? If not, I hope that you will be wary of your surroundings.

I nodded and replied, "Yes, that's right. I know what Big Sis said is right. But it's pointless for me to be fretting about it, right now. The people around me right now are all my people, so I don't have to worry about someone in our group trying to harm me. To avoid trouble, the empress didn't interfere with my guard unit in any capacity. That I can guarantee."

Luna nodded silently and then said, "If you manage to locate the mine and transport the ore back, I think that you will be in even more danger. Previously, the weapons for your guard unit were provided by the royal family, which was a bit better. However, once your guard unit gains access to such a valuable resource, I think you will be in more danger."

I chuckled and responded, "You're really smart, huh, Luna. You're absolutely right. Everything I'm doing is to enable me to become a better sovereign. But the more impressive I become, the more the empress' people will fear me. This is a paradox that can't be resolved. I can't do anything about that. I can't get the Valkyries to trust me, nor can I get Castell to not be wary of me, because I have no way of destroying their loyalty."

"Your Majesty, what are you..."

"I want to continue growing and expanding my power. I'm not consolidating my power to threaten Her Majesty. I'm consolidating my power just to protect myself and for the sake of my dream." I looked at Luna, who stood before me, and sincerely said, "What I need is the power to protect myself. That will grow more and more powerful as I grow."

"Uhm!" Luna gave a firm nodded. She then proudly exclaimed, "Your Majesty, I am your most loyal personal servant. For you, I am willing to be your shield! I will never back down!"

"Don't say that. That hurts my heart." I smiled and stroke Luna's head. I then added, "You're my only personal servant. Who's going to take care of me if

something happens to you?"

Luna giggled, then grabbed hold of my hand and replied with a smile, "Hmm... I want to stay by your side forever. Forever like this... Forever..."

## Ch. 29

"Castell, are you going to help us or not?"

Castell stood at the door feeling a little awkward. He had put on his overcoat and planned to head out, but Alice blocked him off at the doorway. He hasn't wanted to see Alice the last few days. Alice had already made her stance clear. She wanted to harm his majesty. She wanted to at least punish his majesty. Castell himself didn't want to, but he knew he couldn't turn against the Valkyries so he didn't want to see Alice.

"Am I not already helping you? I did not tell his majesty and her majesty about you buying metal. I have helped you keep it under wraps already. I have helped you with something so serious already, how else do you want me to help you?"

Alice frowned, folded her arms, looked up at Castell and in an annoyed tone said: "That's not the help I'm talking about! Your indecisive stance is really getting on my nerves! We're comrades, aren't we? We have worked so hard by her majesty's side for so many years. Are you going to continue maintaining your indecisive stance at this most crucial point in time? Do you still respect and love her majesty? Where's your loyalty?! Are you telling me that time has erased her loyalty and courage?"

"That's not what this is about! I've given up everything for her majesty, you know that very well, Alice!"

Castell scrubbed his head with irritation and then looked at her enraged. Castell was insistent on never letting his loyalty to the empress be questioned. Questioning his loyalty to the empress was the equivalent of questioning his entire life to him.

"If you're still loyal to her majesty, why are you not participating in this?! You know full-well how ambitious his majesty is! He raised his own army, produced his own weapons and now has his own city. He's just one step away from having his own private military! I don't know what sort of sorcery he used to bewitch the empress into the way she is now, but you should be able to tell that the greatest threat to the empire at present is this prince!"

Alice got angrier and angrier as she spoke, almost smashing Castell's expensive door to bits with one punch. Castell's heart ached when he saw the crack on his precious door. He let out a heavy sigh and replied: "Alice, are you absolutely certain that his majesty has an evil ambition? If his majesty wanted the throne, he'd just have to mention it and her majesty will pass it to him for sure given how much she loves him. Why would he need to go through all that trouble?"

"Doesn't that make it scarier?!" Alice looked at Castell aggressively. The empress's throne was the most sensitive topic to Alice and a topic you don't want to cross her about. It wasn't just the Valkyries' responsibility, but more because she witnessed in the flesh how hard Elizabeth worked. She witnessed Elizabeth first raise a nation in ruins and the tears she shed. She witnessed Elizabeth wear her military attire and smash her own throne without reserve. She witnessed Elizabeth fighting right at the forefront when she was wounded all over.....

She witnessed everything. She witnessed the empress's beginnings with nothing to her rise to become an individual who could shake the continent and strike fear into her foes. She was always by Elizabeth's side.

Only such a talented individual was worthy of the majestic title of "sovereign". Only someone like that had the right to sit on the ruler's throne of gold and blood. What right did that man have? Did he ever go through a world of bloodshed and warfare? He hasn't ever held a sword even. What right did he have to earn the favour of the most perfect, noble and outstanding ruler? What right did he have to become the emperor?

Alice is an orphan. She doesn't know what a ruler needs. She doesn't know what sort of person can become a ruler. But she saw Elizabeth. Her admiration and respect for Elizabeth knew no bounds. In her heart, Elizabeth was the only

ruler of this world. That man, that kid, what right did he have to succeed the throne? He just happened to be a lucky brat that was born as Elizabeth's son. He didn't have a shred of Elizabeth's heroic spirit!

That sort of man wasn't worthy of being Elizabeth's successor! He wasn't worthy of having the empire that Elizabeth gave so much to establish just like that! If he threatened Elizabeth's rule, she would give her everything away to bring Elizabeth to her senses and save the empire!

Elizabeth gave away her everything to establish this empire. Alice witnessed every step Elizabeth took and everything she sacrificed to establish this empire. There was no way she was going to let anyone destroy her. If they wanted to destroy what Elizabeth worked so hard for, they were going to have to destroy her first.

"Alice, let's calm down and think about this properly."

Castell pressed his hands on Alice's shoulders, but she smacked his hands away and turned her head away somewhat angry. Castell chuckled awkwardly and then made an open hand gesture. He said, "We both serve her majesty. You want to eliminate his majesty for her majesty's sake, right? In that case, shouldn't we ask for her majesty's opinion first since it's got to do with her majesty? His majesty is her majesty's current only child and her most beloved child. What happens if her majesty falls into despair because we killed him and offs herself?"

"H-... Her majesty has been bewitched by his majesty! If the prince dies, I think her majesty will come back to her senses!"

"Whenever did you see his majesty proactively trying to ingratiate himself with her majesty? He's not the sort of person who wishes her majesty to promote him. He has been to the inner court fewer times than we have been in a single day. As opposed to saying that his majesty is bewitching her majesty, it would be more accurate to say that her majesty is the one who is clinging to his majesty."

Alice clenched her teeth while looking at Castell. Though Castell said things that attacked her majesty, she had no counterargument because Castell spoke the truth.

"Hence, we cannot do something that would anger her majesty. Her majesty wants to have a family. Her majesty left after giving birth to his majesty. I think she must be feeling guilty toward his majesty. If we harm his majesty now, we really will be attacking her majesty herself."

Castell chuckled and looked at Alice who had no counterargument. He continued explaining: "Everything that I do is for her majesty. Her majesty loves her child and his majesty is not vying for the throne right now. Even if we act against him now, it would only be considered an uncalled for attack. Let us focus on gathering power for now. If his majesty shows any behaviour that crosses the line, we will report it to her majesty. Only once her majesty gives her approval can we touch his majesty."

"What if his majesty has gathered enough power too?! Look at his majesty right now. Everything that he's doing is to grow and expand his power!"

"I think her majesty would be very happy if his majesty could grow his power to equal ours. Plus, he would have what it takes to be an emperor by then, wouldn't he?"

Castell smiled then looked at Alice. He wiped his smile away and continued, "Alice, I am loyal to her majesty, not you Valkyries. Therefore, I will not support everything you choose to do. Alice, you are being too rash this time. Do not do something that will make her majesty unhappy. Do not do something her majesty does not want to do. Do you still not understand this?"

Alice clenched her teeth and kept silent for a moment. She then spun around and left him with "I'll come find you again when the time comes" before quickly leaving.

Castell revealed a smile when he saw Alice's tiny yet determined silhouette. He then let out a long sigh, adjusted his collar and took out a gold coin to look at the empress's face-print on it.

He softly muttered to himself: "Your majesty, you have a sad fate. You have to die if you become strong, but you will also die if you do not..... How will you cross this single-log bridge.....? I am most fascinated. However, as Elizabeth's child, you should be fine, right.....?"

## Ch. 30

“Alright, your majesty, if we continue further, we will enter the dangerous region with no administration.”

We stood on the sand dunes and looked at the yellow sand ahead and behind us. Both areas looked the exact same. If Tarak didn’t stop I wouldn’t have known I entered such a dangerous place. But I guess it makes sense. People spoke of this place like it was dangerous as hell. The scene in front of me just looks like a huge collection of yellow sand though. This place looked the exact same as other places. There were no traces of blood or corpses. Not even a human silhouette was in sight.

This place is really disappointing...

Perhaps a good way to describe my feelings would be that I felt somewhat sad. I worked hard to prepare for this. If it looked like a war-zone with corpses lying around, I’d be celebrating. But now I feel like all my preparations were pointless and I felt lost. But then I looked at Tarak next to me who was very serious. It looks like this is the place.

I smiled and said: “This place doesn’t look any different to the outside.”

Tarak tugged on the rope and then sternly said: “Of course it is filled with sand. Everywhere is sand in the desert. We just have not seen people here yet. What makes this place dangerous is not that it is in the desert, because it is the same everywhere in the desert. The most dangerous thing in here is always those around you. But we are at the border right now so we cannot see the most dangerous place.”

I looked at the desert before me and then said: “Since we’ve come here, forget turning tail. Well, I never intended to anyway. Tarak, you know this place better so I’ll let you lead us.”

Tarak shook his head with a smile and replied: “While you say that, I could not find what you were after either, your majesty. Your majesty, I can only guide you to every campsite. Every campsite in the desert is very dangerous. Those are the places we can guarantee our safety from the sandstorms. The situation

in the desert changes in the blink of an eye.”

“Uhm, but are we the only ones who know the campsites?”

Tarak shook his head and replied: “I can only say that that might not be the case. Those who can be here are all elites who know well how to survive in the desert. It would be preposterous for them not to know of the campsites. Of course, as we split up in this large region so we might not meet. Needless to say, fights may break out at night over campsites and then we would use our enemies’ corpses as pillows to sleep.”

“You sound experienced.”

“That is because I have done that before.”

Tarak replied casually. I looked at his eyes that didn’t have a grain of sand on them and chuckled. I really couldn’t tell he could do that sort of stuff. Perhaps he noticed my smile which is why he frowned and said, “Your majesty, killing people does not make one feel guilty. Or rather, human nature is meaningless when faced with life-or-death. I do not want to kill either, but if I do not kill, I will be the one who dies. As such, I must kill him and for the above reason, I will not feel guilty. That holds true even if I had to drink human blood because of that.”

I nodded. People will do anything to survive when faced with a life-or-death crisis. That’s human instinct. Actually, it’s the instinct of all creatures. Maybe everyone can get along during the day, but when night falls, they’ll definitely come into conflict to secure a resting place because nobody can say for sure what that person might do to them while they’re sleeping at night if they accept them into their camp. Hence, the best option was to kill all those you didn’t recognise.

It’s cruel and sounds very unreasonable, but this is an irrefutable truth. Nobody can be trusted in a place without constraints. Trust is spit-out chewing gum if there are no constraints in place. That goes for both animals and humans.

“Alright, let’s start heading to the place closest to our current location. I have searched that section before, but let us carpet-search the area as if we have never searched it.”

Tarak made an invitational hand gesture, then smiled as he said, “Your majesty, please do not be surprised by anything that happens next.”

“I understand, but Tarak, I have a question. Why is there no city in this area? This area is the intersection point between the five nations. If there was a city here, travelling would be more convenient and merchants would have a resting place. It should be a fantastic place for a business-oriented city.”

It’s not completely barren here. There’s an oasis inside this region. They just need to construct a city here. To be fair, this is a great place to build a city so why did this become an uninhabited region?

“This place was actually originally a city, It was close to the oasis. But that was a long time ago. There was a city here roughly around when the five nations of the desert were colonised. It was formed by immigrants and merchants. It was the most extravagant place in the desert at the time as well as the richest. All metals were transported from this city at the time. However, due to the environment as well as wars, the city got levelled and its citizens fled. That was when the five nations of the desert were built up.”

Tarak looked at the end of the desert, silently nodded and continued, “It is said that it was a magnificent city. It is also said that there was a large volume of metals and ores that did not get transported away in time. Of course, these are all legends. The ruins of the city are still there. Countless people searched it over and over for centuries but never found anything.”

“Oh?” I narrowed my eyes and continued, “I see how it is now. It makes sense. This place is excessively flat, making it easy to attack but hard to defend against attackers. That’s a reasonable enough reason to not build a city here. But I am very interested in the legend you mentioned.”

“That is why they are just legends, your majesty. A lot of time has also passed. Roughly a century if I had to say. Mm, definitely more than a century and no less for sure.”

Tarak waved his hand and then added: “It has been many years yet countless people come to try and strike it rich. But forget an ore, they could not even find traces of the ancient city. The greatest find was an incense burner from the ancient ages. That incense burner is still in Nara’s room. Therefore you need not

go there and search, your majesty. It is a good place to take shelter from the winds though.”

“Hmm, alright. We’ll go there if we have a chance then.”

I pondered to myself for a while. I guess it’s only fair. It’s been so long already. If there was some secret treasure there, it would’ve been discovered ages ago. There’s no way nobody has discovered it till now. But then based on what Tarak said, we need to search places that have been searched before nonetheless given that we’ve already come all the way here.

In terms of priority though, let’s put it aside for now since it’s not the point closest to our current location. We’ll slowly move toward that direction and then go check it out if we have time.

“Everyone, prepare your weapons.”

After travelling for ten whole days, I finally gave that order.

We aren’t in a city now. We don’t even have Elizabeth’s protection. This is a primitive jungle with no rules, laws or constraints. There are no virtues or kindness here. The only useful things here are the guns on the soldiers’ backs and the swords in their hands!

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I seriously can’t say for certain. This place isn’t a mountain range or a forest. This place is a continuous path of dunes and sandstorms that come as the wind dictates. There was nothing here that could be examined. Furthermore, I’m clueless to how this sort of mine is distributed around in this world so I just looked at the desert blankly. Like an idiot, I watched Lorana and Tarak struggled through the desert on foot. They had dismounted to examine the sand under foot and would look up every now and then to see the dunes rise and fall. They also occasionally used a very long bit of metal to stab into the ground. I stood aside, afraid I’d get in the way of our two leaders.

I didn’t have a clue as to what the two of them were doing, but I assumed it

was the method for locating the metal. I'm just going to trust the two of them.

Since the two of them had dismounted to walk, our team's speed slowed down significantly. I sent out a sufficient number of scouts, and organised guards to watch our back, front, left and right sides as per Lorana's instructions. There's nowhere to hide in the desert. As long as it's another team, we'll be able to instantly see them.

At the same time, it will be just as easy to discover us so we must locate others before they can locate us. Therefore, if we discover them, we need to take them out first instead of conversing with them. As they say, a long night is fraught with dreams. They might stick one in our back before we know it.

All the teams here have their own backers. They aren't just here to fight for the mine. A better way to put it would be that several powers are playing a death game here; teams killing other teams for the sake of their power. The employer who hired the team are benefitting from it. And no nation can do anything if you kill their people in this area with no administration.

That's why there won't be any peace talks or alliances. This is basically a killing field, a place where you need to kill every living person you meet.

After walking for some distance, the two of them mounted their steeds again. I rode over to their sides and asked, "How is it?"

The two of them shook their heads and replied, "No discoveries, your majesty. Though we knew this already, it feels unfortunate to have to say it again. Very unfortunate we would say. Your majesty, let us head to another spot. We will not need to search this area again..... However, we found traces others left behind here which prove that people had searched this area already."

I nodded. I looked at them and responded, "That's all right. If it could be found on the first attempt, it wouldn't attract so many people here. But you said that you noticed traces of others being here before. So does that mean that it's very likely that there's a team up ahead of us or maybe even several teams?"

Tarak nodded and replied, "I cannot say for sure, but there are definitely people ahead. Your majesty, the scouts you sent out have not come back to

report in. It might be traces left behind several days ago for all we know. Shall we try to chase them and kill them?"

"Uhm."

I nodded with a bit of concern. It's not good news that there's a team in front of us because if we're not very far apart, the resting place we choose for tonight will definitely be the same spot. In other words, a bloody battle will break out for the resting spot.

What shall I do? Shall we continue searching at this pace or should we rush straight to the rest station to set up a defence line so that we have the advantage of choosing the time and place for battle?

Killing them won't benefit my search for the mine in any way. At most, it'll only count as just eliminating one competing team. They currently don't affect my progress much either. If I covet speed, I could just split my team up to search.

"Don't worry about them. Their lives have nothing to do with us. We came here for the mine. Let's stick to the plan and search the areas instead. Whether they live or die doesn't conflict with our objective."

"Understood."

The two of them nodded and then our team continued forward. To increase our chances of locating it, I split the entire region into sixteen sections and searched two sections per day. So we could basically complete our search in the entire region in around eight days. However, if the region is too big, I will still have enough time.

I've only got ten days left. If we don't make progress these next ten days, I'll need Luna to help me suck my mana out for me. While Luna said she could withstand the pain, Luna can't keep up with Mommy Vyvyan's pace. When Luna sucks my mana out, I still feel weak the entire next day. It'd be all right if I was in the royal capital, but if I'm in my weakened state in the desert, there's no way we can travel fast. As a result, we must locate the mine within ten days. Otherwise I'll have to stay another three days in the desert.

Even if I were to replenish our supplies one more time and make use of the

Earth Dragon carriages – which have lots of storage place – my supplies would still only last around fifteen days in the desert. The Earth Dragons are excellent at pulling carriages. However, they require far more rations and water than horses. They're not creatures that live in the desert after all. It's ridiculous to ask them to perform like camels.

"Let's go."

"..... Ah!"

I spun my head around and saw Luna wobble. From atop her horse, Luna shook her head and looked at me with a sick look. It was the first time I saw Luna's condition look so poor. She squint her eyes. Her cheeks weren't red due to heat stroke. Her face was white as a sheet as though she didn't have a drop of blood in her. She couldn't open her eyes because she was exhausted. Shusia who was keeping her steady turned pale from shock. She thought Luna who was leaning on her was just tired. She never realised Luna was in such a poor state.

"Luna! What's wrong, Luna?!"

Lorana moved quicker than I did. She rushed over to Luna's side and looked at her face. Lorana wore a particularly grim expression. She removed Luna's cape and then carried her up. Luna lied lifelessly in Lorana's arms like a corpse. Lorana carried her into an Earth Dragon carriage and then looked at me who ran after them. She took in a big breath and said, "Your majesty, I think this will be tough on you."

I looked at Luna breathing weakly inside the Earth Dragon carriage. In a panicked tone I asked, "My help is needed?! I'll do anything as long as I can save Luna. I have new orders. Everyone march to the rest station as fast as you can and then set up a defence line! Big sis, how is Luna?!"

"Luna didn't get heat stroke. She's suffering from mana deficiency..... Her organs have been damaged which is why it's difficult for her body to produce mana. There's very little mana availability in the desert so that's why she's suffering from this sort of condition. This is a terminal disease for elves!"

"Mana deficiency.....?"

“That’s right, your majesty. When we arrive at the rest stop, please make sure you get intimate with Luna. You must if you want her to live!”

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“Your majesty, the rest station up ahead has been occupied.....”

“We’ll take it from them then.”

I looked at the scout in front of me irritably. I pushed him aside and pulled my handgun out from my back. I looked at Philes behind me and commanded.

“Philes, you take half the men to attack them from the left-wing. Shusia, you take a third of the men, circle around the right-wing and flank them from the rear. Everyone else, attack them head-on with me. Take over the rest-station as fast as possible, understood?”

“Roger!”

Philes and Shusia nodded. Lorana looked at the rest station, laughed and said. “They look like Socina City’s exploration group. Your majesty, are you seriously going to attack them? If you reveal your identity to them, you might be able to get their assistance.”

“I took a massive detour just to avoid letting Socina’s people know of my plans so it wouldn’t make sense for me to reveal my plans. Luna isn’t in a good condition. I don’t have time to talk about shaking hands or working together with them. Just kill all of them and take over the rest station. I won’t risk my Luna’s life.”

I clenched my teeth and looked at Luna inside the Earth Dragon carriage behind me taking weak breaths. Luna’s condition got worse and worse during the journey. I originally thought she got a heat stroke so I didn’t think too much of it, but she wasn’t suffering from a heat stroke. Elves require mana to live. I’m aware of that. I almost died before because of a mana dissolving agent. Luna’s body had been damaged already. If the royal capital wasn’t so close to the elven lands, she wouldn’t have survived in the royal capital.

Moreover, I was providing her with a large volume of mana monthly every full-night moon, but she hadn't had her mana stores replenished for months. Now she's come to the desert where mana is scarce so she'll die if her mana isn't replenished. I calculated so many things but forgot to factor that in. I brought Luna along so that I wouldn't be tormented on the full-moon night. Luna must've been aware of her condition. She knew her condition yet still risked her life to come here while I was completely oblivious.

I can't let Luna become a second Mera! Mera didn't say anything to me at the time so I personally killed her in the end. If I lose Luna this time because she didn't say anything to me, I won't be able to forgive my obtuse self.

I was completely bloody oblivious!

I rode up to the dune, left a few men behind to guard the Earth Dragon carriage behind then turned around to look at my soldiers. I pointed to the next rest-station and loudly said. "Everyone, can you see the next rest station yet? Can you see the people inside? Yes, we have no grudges between us. We have never even met each other before. If we were in another place and not the desert, we might have been able to drink together at night. However, we are in the desert right now and my personal servant's life is in peril. I must take over that rest station. So please lock away your sympathy. In this forbidden area where life and death hangs in the balance, our enemies will be the only ones who die!"

The soldiers exchanged glances with each other, then nodded and responded loudly. "Roger! Your majesty!"

"March!"

Our position was a little higher than the rest station, empowering us with a fiercer charge since we were coming down from higher ground. It's just that the horses couldn't gallop as well as usual due to the sand in the desert. As such, we were slower than when running across plains, and I therefore had to control the vanguard's distance more carefully or else the enemy would be prepared for us.

Normally, a cavalry vanguard would start with small steps and gradually speed up before reaching top-speed right before reaching their target and charge into

the enemy. If the charge is initiated from too far away, not only will the personnel but the horses would also be tired, thereby reducing the impact of the charge.

It looked like the enemy was prepared. I organised an excellent cavalry vanguard formation. I noticed the people inside shouting and calling out to their companions as they picked up their guns and blocked out path in front.

I noticed the right-wing and left-wing attacking groups. While they spotted our cavalry flanking them in the wide-open terrain the desert is, there's nothing they can do. It's too late for them to mount their steeds. My right-wing platoon had already reached their rear. My battle-steeds are among the best of a hundred selected from the royal family's stable. Run-of-the-mill horses can't compare to my steeds.

It appears they never expected us to appear behind them. They were still living their lives when they arrived just now. Their guards had only gotten into place. Their foot-soldiers were our targets to kill in the desert.

They weren't a small group by any means. I saw a cavalry team come out from inside the rest station charge toward Philes platoon attacking them from the left. Another team of cavalries waited for us in their area. If we charge straight over, we'll run into their foot-soldiers' bayonet formation and be faced with their cavalry charging back at us. I must admit that they're a trained team.

We looked like a light cavalry unit to them. A light cavalry unit not even wearing armour can't charge right into a foot-soldier attack formation.

However, my cavalry isn't a group of light cavalry. Their primary weapon isn't the elven sword at their belt but the repeated-firing Spencer rifle in their hands!

“Move fast! Charge!”

The horses' gallops kicked up a dense fog of sand. Lorana charged in front of me and deliberately slowed down until I moved into the centre of the formation. The guards from all sides swiftly gathered around me to put me in the centre of the formation.

Lorana began to speed up and said. “We'll be done for if our commander dies.”

I smiled helplessly and said. “I hope that none of you die.”

“We’re already prepared for that.”

I noticed that the soldiers behind me all had red faces like they were bleeding. No it wasn’t because of the sun but their tension and excitement. This was the first time my guard-unit was charging an enemy formation since their formation. The violent elves from last time didn’t even count as appetisers. This was the first time my guard-unit was charging an organised formation of foot-soldiers and a cavalry unit. This is our first official battle!

This wasn’t a rehearsal or training session. This time, bullets were going to wound them if they got hit and they might even die. But hitting an enemy meant they could receive a reward. Those who killed several enemies were going to be acknowledged. This was the moment they had been waiting for and at the same time, scared of! This was the moment they got to realise their purpose as soldiers!

This was a demonstration of courage and life. This was the explanation of the most perfect opportunity in their lives!

The troops moved into a straight-horizontal line and formed a shooting formation.

Gunfire rang out loudly like typhoons on the left wing. It wasn’t just a one-off sound as guns went off like waves to the shore immediately after the first. I saw the enemies charging toward our left-wing get utterly defeated by our cavalry on the left-wing. The distance between the two cavalry units were no more than ten-metres. When the first row fired at the enemy, their formation crumbled. Those who survived the first wave were scared-stiff in place by the sound of repeated shots. And before they could react, the cavalry with their swords drawn had slashed them off their horses.

“Fire!!!”

That’s right. I didn’t command them to charge but to open fire. Despite our Spencer rifles having a slightly short range, they had a longer range than the enemy foot-soldiers’ rifles. The enemy fired back after we fired out first wave. However, as we split our formation up, we didn’t suffer any casualties, but I heard something zip right past my ear. The enemy cavalry thought we were still

reloading so they tapped their horses and charged forth. I watched their cavalry charge back at us. If we had single-shot guns, there's no way we wouldn't even had the chance to put our guns away and draw our swords at this point. Unfortunately for them, our guns were still loaded!

*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!!*

I felt like the world was spinning. Gun sounds rang out from every direction around me. The smell of smoke made it virtually impossible for me to breathe. The cavalry team that charged back at our left-wing also faced the same consequences. They were virtually annihilated by our repeated-firing rifles at close range. The large area in the desert was filled with the stench of blood spurting in into air like flowers blooming eloquently. The sound of blood falling pit-pat onto the sand made the stench of blood more and more prominent.

My ears were filled with the despair, fear, shock, pity and sad cries of humans, and the sound of horses neighing right before dying. The smell of blood sat on the tip of my nose. The smell of blood and smoke was so prominent in the air you couldn't possibly wave it away. The desert was covered in the smell of blood. The sound of the horse hooves hitting the ground made you think they were marching in a swamp. What the horses kicked up was no longer yellow sand but blood and bits of flesh.

The cavalry tossed their guns aside, drew their swords and charged toward the foot-soldiers that hadn't finished equipping themselves. However, our right-wing came around and completely surrounded them in the centre.

I had no plans of taking prisoners. I don't have the resources to entertain them, so I ignored the pleas of the foot-soldiers, pretending I didn't hear them and allowing my cavalry to trample them.

My personal Dragoon unit's first battle had come to an end. We lost one man and fifty guns. We annihilated all eighty equipped explorers. We seized a large volume of resources and supplies.....

After that, on the first page of the first Dragoon unit's battle history was the record of their battle under the bright-hot sun and sea of sand.....

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I never thought we'd go through what Tarak described right away. We dragged the corpses to another spot and buried them before setting up our camp. We have the dead to thank as they helped set up a prototype camp for us. We lost one man. He unfortunately passed away after being hit with a bullet during the battle while another got hurt and fell to the ground. The injured one made me feel worse than the one who died because I had to send another two to escort him out of the desert. That means I just lost four men over the one battle. Though our losses were more than acceptable and it was an excellent battle, I lost my elites. That made me really sad.

I did say that I didn't have back-up. I don't have a large group of substitutes like the Valkyries. They're my only men. Before I become successful, it'll be very difficult for me to find a group of soldiers as loyal as them. Therefore, losing even one of them really hurt me.

But what made me hurt most right now was Luna. Seeing her lie on the army's bed barely breathing, unable to respond to me regardless of how I called out to her hurt me. I held her hand tightly. Her hands were so cold it was akin to holding a block of ice.

Lorana looked at me sternly with her arms folded and desperately said, "Your majesty, you don't have to hesitate anymore. If you want Luna to live, you must sleep with her. Luna is very important to you, right? What are you going to do on the full-moon night without her?"

"But... but we don't need to resort to this method do we? Can't we just kiss?"

Lorana scrubbed her head like a maniac then pointed at Luna and exclaimed, "Does it look like Luna can kiss with you right now?! She can't breathe right now and you want to kiss?! Are you trying to kill her?! There's no other way, your majesty. Do you not realise how much danger Luna is in right now?! Do you want to save her or not?!"

"No... no... I do want to save Luna! I must save her! There must be a way! There must be a way! There must be!"

I hugged Luna and kissed her lips firmly. However, Luna didn't give any

reaction. It was just as Lorana said. Luna isn't even conscious right now. Doing this is the same as blocking off her last airway.

Luna's expression showed she was suffering painfully. Her weak breaths got blocked by me. I desperately kissed her lips doing my absolute best to transfer my mana to her. Lorana grabbed my hair and yanked me away. She then took Luna away from me. She looked at me enraged and shouted, "Are you trying to kill her?! Didn't I just say that you would only kill her like that?! Can you calm down?! Why do you refuse to sleep with her?! You two have must've done it before, haven't you?! Why are you holding out now?! What exactly are you resisting against?!"

"I..... I....."

I looked at Luna in Lorana's arms blankly. Luna lay in her arms powerlessly. Forget opening her eyes, I almost suffocated her. My heart shuddered as Luna's small body trembled intensely. It was like Luna's every breath brought all of my nerves along for the ride. I looked at Luna in pain. Every cell in my body was crying like all of my meridians were going to crumble to bits.

I don't want... I don't want... I don't want to see someone by my side die in front of me again. I don't want it to happen again... I don't want to..... I never want to!

But why don't I want to do it with Luna? It's not our first time. We've done it multiple times before. Why am I against it now.....? No, not now. I was against it after I got married.....

Why.....? Why did I become reluctant to even meet Luna after I got married? Why do I have these feelings where I want to run away? Why am I so against making contact with Luna? Just why?

"I..... I....."

Lorana looked at me and thundered, "Just what are you doing, your majesty?! It's just a process to save her, so why are you running away from it?! Are you concerned about betraying Nier and Lucia?! Why do you feel that you're betraying them?! It's because you have feelings for Luna! It's because you have feelings for Luna but never admitted it! You wouldn't be so hesitant if you didn't have feelings for her! Did you want to give her a title afterwards?!!"

Lorana placed Luna gently onto the bed then looked at me and firmly said, "Your majesty, if you have feelings for Luna, toss that crooked sense of loyalty in love aside for now. This is not the time for you to be hung up on your love or whatnot. You don't need to give Luna a title afterwards either. I wouldn't think Luna hopes to be given a legitimate title. But right now, she needs your help to live!"

Really.....?

*"Your majesty, with you by my side, the stars in the sky are always so pretty."*

I honestly never said that.

Luna looked so blissful when she said that. Her eyes shimmered like crystals under the light of the stars. They shined no less bright than the stars in the sky. Her faint smile of bliss when she said that made my heart beat faster.

Luna has been by my side for a long time. She's as close as Nier is to me. As a matter of fact, she's by my side even when Nier isn't. I kept saying how I didn't know how I felt toward Luna but I think I understand them a little now. And that is, I like Luna.

We both need each other. We both need warmth from each other. We stargazed at the same stars together but why did I always avoid my feelings for her? I like Luna so why do I avoid her gaze? Luna and I should be most aware of our feelings for each other. We're also aware that we can't be together.

There's no way Elizabeth and Vyvyan will accept Luna. Luna herself also knows that she can't be with me. That's why she chose to be my personal servant to stay by my side and look after me. I avoided Luna because I felt sorry for not being able to reciprocate her love for me and I was running away from the guilt of betraying Nier and Lucia.

Am I going to continue running away like this? Am I going to let Luna die in front of me because of my guilt and apologetic feelings? I can't give Luna a title. I can't give her anything in this desert filled with hopelessness and slaughter. Luna was once a public tool people used to vent and relieve themselves. If I don't give her a title, will her history repeat itself for her?

I didn't save Luna just to make her relive her past!

But right now, Luna.....

“I understand now.....”

I clenched my teeth, looked at Lorana and softly said, “Please leave..... I shall save Luna. I won’t let Luna die in front of me. I have to make sure she gets through this even if she’s displeased or has complaints about what I do. I would rather she slap me across the face than let her leave me like this.”

“Is that so?” Lorana nodded then walked to the tent’s entrance. She then turned her head around and added, “I believe that she won’t hit you or complain. You two are like Tarak and Nara after all, except that your fate is a little sadder.....”

## Ch. 34

“Your Majesty”

“Luna...”

I turned my head around and saw Luna slowly walking over, using an Earth Dragon as support, so I stood up to help her. Luna went along with me and leaned into my arms. I held Luna in my arms, sat down and leaned on the sleeping Earth Dragon. I looked at the fire before me and spaced out. Luna was wrapped up in a thick woollen blanket and curled up in my arms. She breathed softly and gripped my chest tightly with one hand.

*‘I had stopped caring about how my Guard Unit saw me. It was just as Lorana said. If we’re all in this together, a little bit of romance is nothing. I don’t care even if they do spot us together anymore.’*

*‘I was planning to maintain a master and servant relationship with Luna from now. Luna didn’t want to be like Nier and Lucia, either. She knew that she could never be together with me, given what her body was subjected to in the past. The agreement we had let us live peacefully for a long time, but all of that went with the wind, after I held her beautiful and weak body just now. I discovered a different feeling with Luna than with Nier and Lucia. I did it to save Luna, but*

*then I couldn't hold myself back from kissing Luna's lips.'*

*'Just how shameless am I?'*

Luna's condition showed immediate improvement as if her body rebooted its functioning. After her body began recovering, we looked into each other's eyes. Luna then took the initiative to kiss my lips. While we were still sober, we stuck to each other, but not out of pity or necessity.

Our relationship finally crumbled in the end. I'm married. I have Nier and Lucia. I had Nier's protective talisman on me, yet I tore down the wall between Luna and myself.

*'How are we going to face each other from now? How am I going to face my wives? I don't know.'*

*'I can't just leave Luna to die. If I do that, I'd be the same as those who messed with Luna in the past. But I can't give Luna anything, either.'*

Luna is definitely aware of this, as well, but she definitely also understands my feelings.

*'How many more times are we going to do this from now on, during this half-a-month we're away from home? Is Luna going to go from my maid to my mistress? Nier and Lucia could never accept that. If Luna is discovered, Nier will definitely kill her.'*

While in my arms, Luna rolled over and looked at the stars in the sky. She extended her hand out and tried to reach for the dark sky she couldn't possibly reach. She waved her hand. She smiled bitterly and said, "Your Majesty, did you know what I was thinking just now? I was thinking that if you were not the Prince, would our ending be more beautiful?"

*"Your highness... if... if you were not... the Prince..... Perhaps... Perhaps... our ending... would have been better....."*

That voice from the past passed through time and broke through the wall I had put up to avoid recalling those memories to ring in my ear again. The flame reflected Luna's face. Her face was still pale like my lover that had passed away for some time. They were too similar. Everything was too similar. It was like I was in that moment again. It was just as when I tightly held Mera in my arms,

the same as when Mera spoke those final words...

*'If I didn't have these things, if I wasn't the Prince of either nation, would the people around me not get taken from me? If I wasn't the elf-prince, Lucia wouldn't have to travel so far, while she's so weak. If I wasn't the human prince, Nier wouldn't have been locked up in a dark prison crying. If I wasn't the prince, Mera wouldn't have died. Those brave soldiers wouldn't have had to die a decade ago and none of this would've happened.'*

*'I now see that all of this misfortune is because of me. I'm tightly working hard futilely to make those around me happy, but they continue to meet with danger over and over because of me. I'm powerless to do anything. Everything I do just causes more people to die.'*

*'Just what am I doing...? Why did I have to receive this body...? Just how many people... have I destroyed?'*

"But then... if you were not the Prince, I wonder who would have bought me. I would have been moved from one place to another over and over again. If it were not for you, Your Majesty, I would not have freedom or dignity. I would just be a public tool for relief, locked away in a prison somewhere until my death."

Luna placed her hand down and gently clasped my face. She gently wiped my cheeks then with a smile added, "Your Majesty, why are you crying again? You have not done anything wrong. I am happiest when I am by your side. Your Majesty, you are the Prince... Mine... I am so glad."

"Luna... I... I..."

I noticed I was crying when I went to speak. My cheeks felt cold as they were smothered with my tears Luna wiped away. Luna looked at me and softly told me, "Your Majesty, you are the Prince. Please do not ever question that. As the Prince, you make us feel honoured. We are willing to give up everything for you. We feel that everything we have is valuable, precisely thanks to you. Everything. Everything I have was given to me by you. Your Majesty, I have never felt fortunate that it was the prince that rescued me. I felt fortunate that it was you who rescued me, Your Majesty. Your Majesty... I am so glad... that you are the Prince..."

“Luna... I... I can only bring misfortune to you... Everyone around me... because of me... I don’t want you to...”

I wiped my tears and desperately tried to say something.

*‘I don’t want Luna to become a second Mera. Mera’s fate is so similar to Luna. Too similar. And that scares me.’*

“That will not happen to me, Your Majesty. As long as you are here, all will be fine. Your Majesty, I am your personal servant. That will never change. I am just your personal servant.” Luna emphasised that and then struggled to sit up. She cupped my face and sincerely continued, “Your Majesty, you are an outstanding King. Do not ever think it would be good if I wasn’t the Prince’. If you were not the Prince, Miss Lucia would just be a very ordinary elf, Miss Nier would be a Valkyrie until death, while I would still be abused somewhere. Humans and elves will never get along. The world is different for everyone, because of you. Your Majesty, you are a very outstanding King. You are a very outstanding Emperor. I want to watch you become more and more powerful. Please do not waste too much time on me. I am just your personal servant. That is all I am...”

I tightly hugged Luna in my arms and she gently hugged me back. She rested her head on my shoulder, as she gazed at the stars in the sky. Luna is different to Mera. Luna wanted for me to continue advancing forward. She wanted to me to continue like this. She didn’t want for me to stay by her side, even though we knew that we were just like Tarak and Nara.

Next to my ear, Luna quietly murmured, “Your Majesty, last time you said that Mr Tarak continuously giving his best for his love was blissful... I feel the same way now... Sometimes, protecting another’s dream is more blissful than destroying his dream...”

## Ch. 35

I gently covered Luna with the blanket and then picked Luna up from her waist. Luna curled up in my arms and snored quietly with a blissful smile on her face.

*'I don't know about the other nights, but Luna should be able to get a good night of sleep tonight. At least she'll be able to have a nice dream. I can't give Luna anything. I can only promise to always remain at her side, regardless of where we go or what we do. I'll always let her stay next to me and look after me. This should've been a request I made of her, yet she saw it as me showing her affection.'*

*'If this makes her my mistress, then I think this mistress of mine is too pitiful.'*

"Is the moment of bliss over?" Lorana opened the curtain. I gently ran my hand across Luna's face. I then straightened up to look at Lorana and replied, "Uhm... I guess so. What's wrong? Is something up?"

Lorana shrugged and replied, "I think that you're the only one who can act like nothing's the matter in this situation, Your Majesty. When you and your maid were getting cosy, we three did our best for our lives. Look at your tent and the ones around. We did all of that."

I pointed at Luna who was lying on the bed. Lorana hesitated for a moment then laughed dryly and scratched her head. She said, "But the credit for saving Luna goes to you, Your Majesty... Let's put all that aside for now, though. Your Majesty, please come over. Although the three of us have reached a consensus, the final decision lies with you."

"Is there a problem?"

"Yes. Come with me."

I left the tent. This rest station isn't spacious. It was lit up by the fire right now. It's late at night now, but the guards coming back and forth were moving in a very compact manner. We naturally have to increase our defences when it's likely that we'll be attacked at night. Lorana and I went up to Tarak's tent and then squeezed in.

"Greetings, Your Majesty."

Tarak rose as soon as he saw me. He banged his head on the fixed tent and hissed due to the pain. Philes couldn't help but burst out laughing, thereby revealing a really cute smile...

*'I keep feeling that Philes is actually a little cuter than Shusia..... Stop! Stop!!*

*What am I thinking?! Philes is a guy!*'

"Hello everyone. I heard that something came up?"

I sat down on one side and looked at them. Philes nodded then took out a parchment and explained to me, "Your Majesty, this is something we discovered among the items the group left behind. This is their map. It appears that the group has been here for a long time."

I spread the map open. This map was relatively older compared to ours. It appeared as though it had been exposed to intense sunlight. I used the fire as lighting to check out the pen marks on it and remarked, "They've gone to a fair number of places. They've made at least two-times more progress than we have. With this, we can save ourselves from going to a fair few places."

Tarak shook his head and corrected me, "That is not it, Your Majesty. That is not what we wanted to say. Your Majesty, even if they have searched certain places, we need to search it ourselves, too, in case they did not find it. The most informational piece of information on this map is not where they have searched, but where they are headed next. Your Majesty, take a look at this location they marked here."

Tarak pointed to the mark. I frowned and looked as I looked at the marking, where they drew multiple circles around a location and asked, "This is the place they were going to search next? If that was the case, they wouldn't have marked it so many times. Are you saying that they thought this was the place where it is most likely to be located?"

Lorana leaned over and bent over at the waist in front of me to look at the map and said, "I would surmise so. We found a number of things on their bodies and many of them were symbolic items of those they killed. It looks like the group had killed a fair number of people. They could be considered the most experienced team here. They have searched for a long time already and guessed that this was the place. While we have searched the places they have searched, I think we should head to this place next."

*'It looks like she doesn't realise she has a decent body.'*

Embarrassed, I lowered my head and fixated my eyes on the map.

*'If I looked up, I'd be spinning at the sight of the top-half of her pretty white melons...'*

In a hesitant tone, Tarak explained, "I was thinking the same thing. It is just that I am a little concerned, since if we base it on the time that has passed, there should be a lot of others who have pinpointed that location as well. I think that if this place is the most likely to be correct spot, then it will not be just one team that knows of it. I think there will be lots of people there."

"So you're saying we might be marching into a trap ourselves?"

Philes looked at me and in a serious tone suggested, "There is another possibility. And that is that this team was bait. I say that because we found out that this group was very odd. Lots of them are evidently Socina's criminals. We found an amnesty on them. They had a letter on them. They were called 'three'. That means that they are not the only team Socina sent. It is very probable that they are bait to lure us to the location here, to annihilate us."

I nodded and then looked at the area on the map. I looked up at Tarak and asked, "Tarak, are you familiar with the place?"

Tarak nodded and replied; "Your Majesty, this place is the ruins of where the original city was. The place is as I described, ruins with just pillars and collapsed buildings there."

I nodded and responded, "In that case, I do think it's a good place to lay an ambush. There's no other feasible place to set up an ambush other than the ruins. However, is the place large enough to set up enough people for an ambush? Also, we'll leave right away if there's an ambush. It's not easy to engage ambushes with horses in the desert. I don't think it's an ambush."

Lorana nodded and added, "I don't think it's an ambush, either, because the desert is so flat that it's impossible to use an ambush tactic. In my opinion, if they're planning something, it should be a..."

"A skirmish."

I placed the map down and looked at the three of them. I then sternly went on, "This is a skirmish and a big fight at that. If they spread this news all throughout the desert, then it was to lure everyone to this location and then

have everyone engage each other in a large scale battle. It would be the biggest battle royale. Then the people who spread this news would be able to sit back and reap the rewards.”

“What are we going to do then?”

I slammed the map hard on the table with my hand. I then looked at the three of them with nervousness and excitement. I seriously said, “We’ll go there, too. If they’re the mantis that stalks the cicada, then we’ll be the oriole that lurks behind them!”

## Ch. 36

I don’t know what information that team from Socina City revealed to us. I don’t know if the information is true or false. As a matter of fact, I don’t even know what the mark means, but I feel that there’s definitely meaning to us going there. We’ll get something out of it for sure, regardless of what happens. We’re just searching randomly now anyway. We’ll have to search that location sooner or later, so it matters not if we go there now. We might even find the mine once and for all.

I’m not sure what the risk is, though. However, after this battle, I’m full of confidence for my army. I trust that they can win against bandits and thugs. Even if we meet an elite, armed professional team, we’ll be able to defeat them.

I never thought I’d find a clue so soon. This might reduce the amount of time I have to spend in the desert a fair bit. I need to make sure Luna can wake up normally every day, due to her body’s condition. I don’t know how long the mana I supplied Luna with can be sustained for. I, therefore, decided to replenish her mana store every night.

It feels as if Nier is with me... But compared to Nier, Luna is more skilled. We both know that we can only do this in the desert, so Luna tries to enjoy it as much as possible every time. Similarly, I threw myself at her, releasing any restraints on myself. Nothing that takes place here in the desert will be

recorded. We can only love each other here. Once we leave the desert and I get back, I'll be Nier and Lucia's husband, and their children's father whether or not we find what I want. I'll be the prince, and Luna's master.

Only here can we witness our love. After we leave, we will return to our previous relationship.

The city ruins are still some distance away from us. We maintained a normal pace on the way there. I didn't want us to get caught in an ambush on the way. The journey there was peaceful, but we did run into two small-scale attacks. They were after our resources in our Earth Dragon carriages. Nobody can support themselves sufficiently to live in the desert. Our assailants entered the desert before us. They'd all be dead before attacking us if they didn't steal.

However, we defeated them. They were determined to return with supplies, but they could only relieve themselves of their suffering when faced with true power.

"Your Majesty, we will arrive the day after around roughly noon. We will be entering the area where the oasis is tomorrow, and we may encounter locals there."

I put my bag of water down then looked at Tarak with a frown. I asked, "Didn't you say nobody resided there? What is this about locals?"

Tarak hesitated for a second, before smiling and replying, "Strictly speaking, they cannot be considered locals but rather nomads. They have many places of residence and the oasis is one of them. As there are few lakes in the desert, this is when the water level is best during the year. As such, they will definitely go there. Of course, I cannot say for certain if they did not go there in order to avoid danger, since there are so many people present in the desert at present."

"Whose side are they on?"

"None." Tarak hesitated for a moment before explaining, "At least they do not belong to any side as far as I know. The nomads do not appreciate favours. Nara... erm, Lord Nara wanted to offer them a permanent home in Karnashun, but they adamantly refused. They said something about insisting that they wanted to ensure they could pass down their traditions, and therefore, refused to become part of any city. Consequently, they go back and forth between all

the oases, and sell us livestock. In reality, we do not need livestock, while the prices they offer are extremely unreasonable. Nara is the only one who accepts their offers.”

I chuckled. I never imagined Nara would be a philanthropist, but I’m not convinced that she doesn’t get anything out of it. Nara isn’t that nice. In fact, I wouldn’t call her a kind person. I’d consider her a realistic person. If she didn’t stand to gain anything from them, she would never bother with them. I just don’t know what purpose they serve.

That’s Nara’s business. I’m not a resident of the desert so I don’t know the answer.

“So, they could be considered friendly then? They won’t open fire after exchanging just a few words, right?”

“I cannot say for sure. They are armed. I do not think they will be particularly happy to see us in their pastoral area. However, I do not think that they will open fire without a word. Your Majesty, if you want to guarantee our safety, please allow me to take the badge and heraldry to go ahead. They are somewhat thankful toward Nara. I think that they will not do anything to the people of Karnashun.”

I shook my head and replied “It’s not good to reveal our identity. While they may not open fire on you, if we’re noticed, the other people that are honest to themselves will swallow us whole. We must keep our identity well-hidden. I have my own plans for this journey and my plans must be kept secret. Since we’re here, we’ll need to be more careful. Tarak, have you noticed that the closer we are getting to that location, the more scouts we see returning? There are no longer just one or two teams around us anymore.”

Tarak nodded and responded, “In that case, if we see nomads, I shall head over first and talk to them. It would be for the best if we can avoid conflicts.”

“We’ll do that then. I don’t know why the number of teams around us is increasing, but I have a feeling that we will encounter them at our destination... Of course, that’s just my guess. It could also be that we’re getting deeper and deeper into enemy territory, which would explain why the number of people around us is increasing.”

“Whatever the case, please be cautious, Your Majesty.”

“Shouldn’t you all?” I smirked and then stood up. I picked my bag of water up and said, “I’m returning to my tent. Call me anytime if something comes up.”

“Understood.”

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Current time at the elven imperial capital.....

“Lucia!!”

Echte shouted loudly scaring Lucia. She fell onto her bottom on the ground. She quickly picked up her sword, while the soldier practicing with her stood in place, trembling as he looked at Echte, who came over like a lion. Echte, however, didn’t bother with him. He, instead, grabbed Lucia’s shoulder with one hand. He looked at her face covered in sweat and thundered, “My goodness gracious, what are you doing?! You’re pregnant with His Highness’ child and yet you still dare to spar with a sword?! How are you going to explain yourself if something happens?! How are we going to explain ourselves to Her Highness?!”

“Explain what to me?”

Echte quickly turned his head around, adjusted his expression and bowed. He respectfully greeted Vyvyan, “Your Highness...”

“Lucia is still sparring with a sword. She’s very diligent. Despite no longer being the captain of the Shadow Squad, she’s not being lax.” Vyvyan walked up to Lucia’s side with a kind smile. She then looked at Echte with a smile and said, “Echte, you don’t need to be worried. Nothing can destroy the protective barrier I created for Lucia’s child. The only two people in this world who could cause her to have a miscarriage are myself and her.”

“But... Lucia doesn’t have any self-awareness!”

“That’s true. But this level of sparring won’t harm her. Nevertheless, Lucia, do you have no other way of entertaining yourself other than sparring?”

Vyvyan stroked Lucia’s head and chuckled in a soft tone.

“Your Highness... I... I am sorry.”

Lucia apologetically lowered her head. Vyvyan pursed her lips into a smile and then said, “Let’s go Lucia... it’s time for you to head up and have your medicine... Mm, I know that it’s very bitter, but it’s very good for your child. You don’t have to be so adverse to it. Haven’t I always drunk it with you? Let’s go. You’re carrying my child’s child, after all, aren’t you?”

## Ch. 37

“Luna...”

“Your Majesty...”

I hugged Luna gently in my arms. Luna wore a smile as she drew circles on my chest with one of her hands, whilst rubbing the bite mark on my shoulder with her other hand.

*‘Luna bites my shoulder when she gets turned on. This shoulder of mine was already covered in bite marks. I’m already worried about how I’m going to explain this to Nier when I get back. Maybe I should steal some of the elves’ spring water to heal it before heading back.’*

Luna rubbed her head on my chest somewhat shyly, similarly to a kitten curling up in my arms. With a smile she said, “Your Majesty... I honestly feel very blissful... I am filled with bliss every time... I can understand how Miss Nier feels now, because doing this sort of thing with the man I love is completely different to my previous experiences. It really is a blissful experience... Especially afterwards where I get to be embraced by the man I love...”

“Yeah...? I feel really blissful too... Honest.”

I parted her messy hair in front of her forehead, while holding her in my arms. I then wiped her sweat that she sweated during our active moments. It seems that Luna went really hard. I laughed and then lowered my head. Luna raised her head up causing our lips to touch gently and then we felt the desire to kiss again...

“Your Majesty! Ah.....”

Philes suddenly pulled the cloth curtain to the tent open and froze up when he saw us... But that's not what's most important here. What's most important was that Luna was completely nude right now.

*'The punk saw everything!'*

"I didn't see anything! I didn't see anything!! I apologise, Your Majesty! I apologise!!"

"Why'd you barge in without saying anything first?!!!"

"Because there is an emergency!!"

My anger got put out by his explanation. I picked up my clothes by the side and quickly got dressed. Luna wrapped herself up in the blanket then stood up to drape my cape over my shoulders. I nodded and kissed her on her forehead. I then followed Philes outside. Seeing Philes quiver, I said, "What exactly happened? I'm still mad you know. If it's not an urgent matter, I'll punish you. I'll bring Shusia to my tent."

"Don't! Don't! Don't! Don't!! Your majesty!" Philes reacted as if a formidable enemy had arrived. I looked at her tremble... Crap! My bad! I looked at *him* tremble and my anger dissipated. I smiled. I then rubbed his head and asked, "So what exactly happened?"

"A young boy ran into our camp....."

"A young boy?"

I paused for a moment.

*'Logically speaking, an exploration team wouldn't have brought a child along. The child would only be dead weight, so the child shouldn't have appeared here in the desert. Where did the kid come from? Could it be a kid from the nomads nearby? Why would the child appear? So nomads are next to us?'*

"Wake everyone up. Everyone prepare for a fight!!"

"Roger!!"

Philes dawdled, but the expression he looked at me with was serious. He took a whistle out from his shirt. The high-pitched whistle shattered the silence of the night in the desert. Sounds were heard from inside all the tents as all of the

soldiers quickly rushed out of their tents holding their rifles. They immediately rushed toward the tent that was put together in a simple fashion.

If there are nomads next to me, then they are seriously frightening to be able to walk right into my camp under the watch of my scouts and guards.

I looked at Philes and asked, "Take me to see the kid. Does the kid have any letter on him or something else?"

Philes nodded and replied, "Yes he does; or rather..."

"Your Majesty!!! A cavalry unit is approaching our camp at high-speed!"

Before Philes could finish, a guard shouted loudly in our direction. I pressed one hand on Philes's shoulder and commanded, "You take half of the men, mount your horses now and circle around from the rear. Then wait for us to engage them here before boxing them in. Tarak!! Tarak!!"

Tarak ran over. While panting, he asked, "Your Majesty, what are you orders?"

"Take a team to guard our rear! We can't lose our camp. We need to hold out until daylight. I don't know what exactly happened, but I believe that this has to do with that boy. Make sure to protect him. The camp must not fall! Arrange for a cavalry team to be on standby in the camp!!"

I climbed up a simply put together watchtower and saw a group of fire-torches charging toward us at high speed.

*'I only had a few dozens of people to defend our tiny camp. Based on the number of fire torches I saw, I'd say they number more than twice our number. As for whether it's nomads of explorers... I don't know.'*

I don't plan to say anything, either. We had actually set up simple landmines nearby the vicinity of our camp. Very simple landmines. They're the type where when someone steps onto them, it triggers the gunpowder to surge upwards and to the flammable. The fire will create an explosion below at the bottom which rushes up and creates an explosion.

Though there's basically no skill involved, it's still very effective.

I wasn't planning to warn them or something, though. I just watched them

run into our minefield. The explosions were loud as though a mountain collapsed while their flesh and blood sprayed into the air. Some organ or whatever it was flew onto my face. Their vanguard cavalry unit's formation disintegrated. I walked down to the sentry post and roared, "Cavalry! Charge forth and defeat the enemy!!"

"Roger!"

Our cavalry jumped and stepped over the piles of flesh in the landmine area and began their attack. The fire dragons manhandled the enemy's cavalry, while on the other side, Philes' cavalry unit had surrounded the enemy. They cut down the remaining cavalry comparably to cutting vegetables on a chopping board, leaving a big fire on the ground.

I didn't even hear the groans of injured personnel, because nobody got hurt.

"It's over, right...?"

I watched my cavalry units return to the camp. The skirmish was neutralised by my landmines. We suffered no casualties nor injuries while defeating the enemy. Though some escaped, I was glad no one was hurt.

"Reporting, Your Majesty!! Another cavalry group is quickly approaching us from the right!!"

"Reporting, Your Majesty! A group of foot-soldiers are closing in on our left!"

"Reporting, Your Majesty! Other teams are encroaching upon us from the front!"

"That many?!"

I looked at the guards in front of me stunned. My team may be strong, but I was surprised with the sudden huge enemy numbers. I looked at Philes and Philes didn't look as though he liked what he heard, either. We have no tenable defence position here in the desert. Even if we did set up horse barricades, it would be meaningless against an attack with such large numbers.

*'What should I do with enemies rushing at me from all sides?'*

*'I think it must be because of that kid...'*

Lorana held a long sword I'd never seen before. She looked at me and asked,

"Your Majesty, what are we going to do? It's alright for us to drive the kid away now, right...?"

I clenched my teeth and commanded, "No. Since the enemy sent five divisions to eliminate me, that proves that the child is definitely valuable. I believe that he's useful, as long as we can defend successfully. I'm not going to let a present that came to my doorsteps on its own accord leave! Leave behind two reserve cavalry units. Everyone else, bring up the rear. Form a three-row shooting formation. Bring all the prepared ammunition out. Hold the lines! Defend with your lives!!"

## Ch. 38

Dawn comes earlier in the desert than other places. However, I felt this dawn came too late. Perhaps it was because the heavens saw how bright this place was and decided to ignore it, since it was already so bright.

But the heavens didn't catch the stifling smell of smoke and blood spraying forth from people choking. They didn't see the mountain of corpses, which dyed the large area red. The golden sand was now dyed red. Step down into it and the blood would gurgle. The darkness nearly covered the entire sky. The wind blew the clothing of the corpses up into the air and took the stench of blood away with it.

Previously, we felt this place was hell.

Now, it really had become hell.

I sat on the empty ammunition barrel, feeling exhausted. I looked at the guards in front of me, who were lying on the wet ground in all sorts of postures and spaced out. I then looked up at the sky above. Just half an hour ago, this place was rowdy with roars in all different languages, the sounds of guns fired and blades clanging. The entire desert quaked at the frenzy. But it was now silent as if nobody ever existed here.

I have no idea how many bullets I fired nor do I know how many people I killed last night. I didn't even make sense of last night's situation. I've never

witnessed such a chaotic battle. The teams that attacked us weren't united. In fact, they got into a fight right outside of our camp. More and more teams entered the fray. There was no alliance. If they weren't the people who came with you, they were your enemies. I don't have the foggiest clue as to who attacked us. Actually, I think it'd be more accurate to say, everyone was attacking us.

We relied on just barricades about the height of a human being and our guns to push back the waves of enemies that came at us. After one hectic slaughter, the darkness before us had been replaced with a mountain of corpses. My guard unit was exhausted, too. About twenty of our men died in the battle, while the others suffered either severe or minor wounds. Luna was coming over helping bandage the soldiers.

We had emptied our barrel of gunpowder. The ammunition we brought had been used up. I was originally planning to fight another battle at the ruins, but I've played all my cards already, and for nothing. Instead of calling it a defence battle, it'd be better to say we got pulled into a pointless battle royale.

We killed enough people, but we got nothing out of it. If anything, we lost our resources for survival in the desert. Our guns are different to theirs. Their bullets are completely different to ours. Even if we were to take their guns and ammunition, we've completely lost the ability to put pressure on the enemy with our firepower.

We've lost almost half of our fighting power. Of the remaining half, we need men to escort the severely wounded out of the desert, as well. In other words, I only have thirty men to dispatch now, and I had some minor wounds myself.

*'Shall I leave?'*

If we leave now, we will be able to reach safety. The smartest choice in this situation is to leave. If you had a brain, you'd leave now. The desert is an extremely dangerous place. Continuing to stay without weapons and men is the equivalent of marching to your own death.

"Your Majesty, this is the child."

I heard a fatigued voice from behind. I spun around and Tarak led a young kid up to me. The kid had dark skin and wore tattered clothing. He wore a pendant

which was the tooth of some animal I was unsure of at his chest. He was evidently covered in filth.

I wonder how long he's been running around in the desert.

He looked at Tarak and he looked back at me. He suddenly dropped down to his knees before me with a thud. He grabbed onto my leg and cried about... I don't know. I looked at him blankly and then looked at Tarak. In a tired voice I asked, "Tarak, can you understand what he's saying?"

"I can."

Tarak bent over and stroked his head gently. He comforted him in the same language. The kid wiped his tears and then murmured for a long while. He grabbed Tarak's arm and said something. Tarak nodded as he listened in. He then looked up at me with a serious look and said, "Your Majesty, he said that his tribesmen are stuck at the ruins and he was hoping we'd be able to go rescue them."

I chuckled in a ridiculing tone. I then hopped off the gunpowder barrel and lifted the kid's arm up. I didn't care if he could understand me or not. I pointed at the messy camp and empty barrel. I then said, "Look. Look, kid. Take a good look at this place and then you tell me. Does it look like I can go to your tribesmen's rescue?"

Tarak didn't translate it right away. He, instead, looked at me and frowned. He asked, "Your Majesty, would that be... too cruel of us?"

"Cruel?" I stood up while looking at Tarak. I made an open hand gesture to say, "whatever you say," and exclaimed, "Tarak, how do you think we're going to go rescue them? You tell me. You witnessed first hand last night's events and you know about our current circumstance, with our regards to our resources. You tell me, do I have spare manpower to go and rescue someone? What I'm thinking about right now is how to return, not how to advance! If you want to be justice's sidekick, please replenish my resources for me, so that I can go and save them!"

The kid seemed to understand what I said. He grabbed my arm and pulled out a sheet of paper that was so old I'd virtually tear it if I touched it and handed it to me. I picked it up and took a look. It resembled a treasure-map. However,

this should be years ago. It must a treasure from ages ago.

“Your Majesty, he said that this is the location of the mine everyone is searching for.”

Tarak looked at me and I detected rays of hope in his gaze. I was stunned at first. I looked at the sheet of paper. The problem was the sheet of paper wasn’t complete. There was only half of it. The direction the arrow pointed was missing. In other words, I have the useless half. As for the other half...

“Interesting...”

I smirked and then looked at the map in my hand again. It was the first time I felt my dream was so close to me, yet impossible to get my hands on, just as the stars in the sky. They’re right in front of you, but reach for them as you may, you can’t touch them.

*‘I’ve stargazed countless time. Does that prove my point?’*

“Your Majesty, what are we going to do? Are we going to continue forward or are we returning now? If we return now, we can still make it. We can come back at another time...”

“Do you think the trapped people will last until we come back?”

I sighed. I then stood up and pinched the map in my hand tightly. This was the tribe’s way of pleading for help. They handed over half of the map and kept the other half, so I must save them. I now understand why that group chased this kid. They were trying to snatch this half.

Or maybe this was a deal with the tribe. Kill them and you won’t get the complete map. That would explain why they chose to trap them in a siege, yet not harm them. After trapping them, they could obtain the complete map if they could strike up a deal.

‘What should I do? I’ve already obtained half of the map. Am I just going to return like this? If I return like this, I can’t get the other half and this will just be a pointless piece of scrap paper.’

“What do you want us to do then, Your Majesty?”

“... Let me have a think... let me have a think. Call Lorana and Philes here. I

need to have a think... We can't be hasty about this... I need to have a think about it."

## Ch. 39

I was sitting on the gunpowder barrel. I looked at the three before me and seriously asked, "That's the current situation. The problem we're faced with now is very serious. And that is, what are we going to do? We're just one step away from our dream, but it's one very hard step to take."

This decision affects the lives of our entire team, yet we were discussing it while sitting on a few old-broken barrels of gunpowder, dressed in filthy clothing stained with blood.

It didn't look formal in the slightest.

Lorana wiped her long-sword. I got a glimpse of what it meant to hold the title of the continent's number-one Sword Saint. She didn't use any enchantments or even mana. She relied purely on her sword skills to defeat an entire platoon of enemies, slaughtering all of them without letting her clothes get damaged.

She narrowed her eyes after hearing my question and asked, "That, Your Majesty, depends on how you're thinking about it... Let me reword that. When faced with this question, are you considering it as the Prince or the future Emperor?"

I hesitated for a moment and then asked her, "Is that somehow related?"

Lorana snickered and replied, "Of course it is. If you're considering it as the prince, then you can leave now, since it's not absolutely necessary for you to complete this task. Leaving won't affect your identity or status as the Prince, as you can leave it to Her Majesty. You just need to return to the city. If you are considering it as an Emperor, then you must complete this task. I believe that if it was Elizabeth, who was in your shoes, she'd surely continue. She definitely wouldn't leave this place."

"I don't think that our soldiers have the strength to continue, though..."

I looked at my soldiers around me, who were exhausted and lying scattered all around. Those who could still move looked white as a sheet. I looked at them and couldn't imagine how they could continue advancing in their state.

*'I do want to advance but can my men?'*

Lorana looked at me and firmly replied, "Your Majesty, whether soldiers can advance or not lies with whether their leader has what it takes to make them advance or not. What you need isn't power as a leader nor is it a question of how much prestige you have, but your will to advance as a King. If you hesitate in front of your soldiers, they won't have any desire to advance. You must stand in front of them. They will have the strength to advance. Elizabeth would never leave. She would definitely stand at the front of her soldiers. Your Majesty, if you stand at the front as the leader, your soldiers will not feel lost. As long as you have hope in your heart to advance, you won't fall here."

I nodded. Philes looked at us and hesitated for a moment before wiping the sweat on his face. He asked, "Our men might be able to advance, but we do not have weapons to defeat the enemy. We virtually have no weapons anymore and we have used up all of our bullets. If we go to their rescue now, are we confident that we can rescue them?"

Tarak nodded and added, "We are indeed very close to our destination, but we will not gain anything out of rescuing them. When that happens, it will end the same way as leaving. If we leave, we will definitely make it out alive. However, if we fail to rescue them, we will not be able to return. This is a gamble. Your Majesty, we may not be able to rescue them, so I do not recommend rescuing them."

I nodded. He was right. Maybe I could get my soldiers on their feet to advance, but they can't defeat enemies with their teeth or fists. We've killed a good number of people here, so who knows how many people are still there. We don't have many usable weapons left. We're here to search for the metal, precisely because our gun barrels can't be used. The only useable weapons we have left are the elven swords.

*'So what will we use to defeat our enemies?'*

Our soldiers are technically the exact same as other human soldiers. My

soldiers are so formidable thanks to our more advanced weapons. But we don't have our weapons anymore. I believe that soldiers Nier personally trained are very strong, but I can't let my exhausted soldiers fight with just their swords.

The enemy has guns, after all. I can't let them charge at enemies armed with guns using their bodies as shields.

Lorana chuckled in a weird tone then pointed at the Earth Dragon lying on the ground. She suggested, "We aren't completely unarmed. Isn't that a perfect weapon? Do you think there's anyone who could defend against five massive beasts charging at them? We just need to charge into the enemy and then our foot soldiers can close the gap and begin to cut the enemies down, right?"

I stood up and looked at the Earth Dragon. I suddenly realised that I wasn't completely unarmed. I still have the weapons Mommy Vyvyan gave me, and they were numbers and tens of ignite and explosive potions. I can charge into the enemy, then throw them into the enemy formation to disintegrate their formation. My men will then be able to attack them from another side. I can rescue them using a diversion tactic.

I looked at Lorana and commanded, "Kill one Earth Dragon."

"What?"

Lorana hesitated.

"Kill one Earth Dragon and feed its flesh to our soldiers. Use the remaining water to brew a pot of Earth Dragon Stew and give our men a sumptuous meal. We're going on the attack next."

I looked up to the sky and continued, "If we move fast enough, we'll reach our destination tonight. We don't have many more resources anymore, so we don't require so many Earth Dragons anymore. We just need one Earth Dragon to guard our remaining resources and two to send our wounded men back. Leave behind half of our men to protect our wounded. We'll pick them up when we come back."

I touched the necklace at my chest and clenched my teeth. I can call Mommy Vyvyan with this necklace. I can succeed for sure if Mommy Vyvyan comes, but I know that I can't depend on mom's strength anymore. If I still need to rely on

Mom to come help me, then there'd be no point in me coming here.

I must end this with my own effort. I must accomplish my goal with my own strength. I must personally locate the mine. I've worked hard up until now. If I quit now, I won't have the right to talk about being a qualified King in the future.

I must complete this task. I won't give up after coming all the way here. No. Way, I'm just one step away from achieving the future I want. I don't want to quit now.

"Call all our men here. Call all our men who can still move here. Kill an Earth Dragon and feed it to them. Next, we'll break through the enemy's last siege. I won't back down! I'll bite them and use my fists if I must! We're right in front of our dream! I won't give up!!"

## Ch. 40

'Sorry.'

I looked at the big boiling pot of soup in front of me and expressed my apologies for the Earth Dragon who diligently pulled the horse carriage the entire journey. I sincerely didn't want to kill it, but for a better future and to realise our future, its sacrifice was necessary. Its sacrifice brought us a greater victory.

The troops who fought all night were full of praise for the stew. Earth Dragon meat does indeed taste really good, after all. Plus, humans have never had Earth Dragon meat before. They were starving, so they greatly enjoyed the stew and meat. Even those who were wounded had a fair bit of the broth.

We used up most of our water here. If we can rescue the people inside, I believe they have sufficient water we can use to replenish our's. Once we defeat the enemy, we can plunder the enemy's supplies. This was a gamble itself. If we don't make it, we're doomed, no questions asked. Since we're going to die, I'd rather enjoy a final moment of bliss before death. By that I mean being able to enjoy mouthfuls of Earth Dragon stew.

If we succeed, I'll achieve fame right away. If we fail, on the other hand, we'll all be doomed. This is a gamble with my fate.

*'What's it like there? What can be found there? Are the people there still alive.....? There are too many unknown variables that make the future a big question mark.'*

Our fate is no longer in our hands, at least not right now. Having chosen to advance forward, we're going to need to rely on our ability to adapt to the circumstances and my men's drive. That's all we can do and all we've got.

"Men."

I stood up and looked at my soldiers that just had a full meal. Their faces were no longer so pale after their full meal. They came over to sit on the ground and looked at me. What I was about to say next could change their fate, so their faces were full of eagerness.

I didn't know what they were looking forward to. Maybe they were hoping I'd give the order to leave. Maybe they were hoping I'd give the order to continue forward. I couldn't tell from their expressions, and I didn't call them here to ask for their opinion. I called them here just to announce my plan. I called them here to carry out my goal.

I am the King, so I need to lead them to make my dream a reality. My dream provides them with direction. My dream could grant them the fame as a warrior and the power of money. That was our goal. If we backed down now, we'd have come here for nothing.

"Gentlemen, I have nothing to hide from you. We are only a few hundred metres away from our destination. I have found half of the map to the mine we're searching for from the kid we protected. We'll get the other half if we can rescue the kid's tribesmen. I know that you're all exhausted and that you've gone through your food, but despite that, I hope that you can light up your courage and confidence again, pick your swords up again, and bring your battle steeds out again. We're standing on the edge of hope, right now. Are we going to give up now? Think about all the things we went through on the way here. Would it sit right with you to turn around now?"

I was actually really worried that they were fed up. I was very worried that

they thought this was enough. If they do say that then I'm at a loss, too. I can't force a group of people to go into danger. If that's how they feel then I'll be forced to leave.

The soldiers exchanged looks with each other and then stood up. They had made up their minds before I finished. They looked at me and though tired, replied resolutely, "Your Majesty, we shall follow your command!"

"Even if I ask you to continue forward?"

"We had always done our best for your dream anyway."

The soldiers, my somewhat cute soldiers looked at me with determination and I looked back at them. I only ever did them one favour. I saved their friend, and without even knowing it for the record, yet they followed me to Troy City and accepted all sorts of training without any complaints or regrets. They've chosen to advance for me without hesitation now when I need them most, and we're also faced with our greatest threat yet.

Despite seeing former comrades lose their lives in front of them, and despite seeing a sea of flames and blood flying through the air, they didn't complain at all. They held their heads up in front of me, in spite of their fatigue. They were willing to follow me to the end for my dream and for the favour I did.

I felt as if my words were stuck in my throat. I looked at my determined soldiers. My words got stuck at my throat after I went to speak. I really didn't know what to say.

*'How should I express my gratitude to them? What should I say? What should I do? What was the point of my words of encouragement?'*

After a moment, I only had one thing left to say. I faced them and gave them a deep bow, "Thank you, guys."

A troop looked at me and responded loudly, "Your Majesty! If we were afraid, we would have turned you down when you came to us. When we promised to serve you, we were already ready to give up everything. You personally invited us. You saved our friend. You provided us with the best treatment. It is time for us to repay you, Your Majesty! It is an honour to be able to die for one we loyally serve! If we back down now, what would the point of our efforts last

night be? Therefore, Your Majesty, you just need to tell us what to do. We are your guards! We will serve you at your side! We will never back down a single step!"

"All right! I shall give my command then!"

I opened my arms as though I was going to hug every single one of my guards. I once envied the Valkyries' loyalty. Though it was slightly crooked, being able to die without any hesitation for one's master is admirable. However, I now see loyalty which belongs to me.

*'Isn't my soldiers' generosity in this dangerous situation loyalty which belongs to me?'*

Their loyalty is not inferior to that of the Valkyries.

I can't let their loyalty go to waste. I need to quickly organise them. I'll leave a group to stay behind and guard the wounded. The remaining members will split into two teams. One team will sneak in from the rear, while the team I personally lead will create a diversion from the front. We will break down their defence line and lure them over.

However, once our small Earth Dragon team gets surrounded, we will be trapped for good. These Earth Dragons aren't combat types. They're just good for pulling carriages. In a surrounded situation, they might not be able to break through a second defence line.

But as I said, I won't back down.

Since everyone wants for me to go forward and supports my decision, I'll forge forward without hesitation.

## Ch. 41

*'Actually, I think that there shouldn't be that many people there if we were to kill a group at that small campsite, since they all basically know about this, and since they know, they definitely would've come to try and snatch the kid from us.'*

Luna really liked the kid and he hugged her as if he found his haven, sobbing in her arms the entire time. Luna gently hugged him. While they spoke different languages, her gentle caresses were enough to reassure him.

*'I had no reason to be jealous of the kid. But seeing Luna's blissful expression, I guess the kid made Luna's dream of being a mother a reality. She can't have kids; however, her motherly nature as an elf made her have a desire to love kids. I think the kid will be able to let her experience motherly love, too.'*

We marched really quickly. Luna was seated in the last Earth Dragon carriage we had, though I was against bringing Luna along. This isn't a safe journey after all. It was a gamble with our lives on the line.

*'I can lose my life and my army, but I couldn't lose Luna. I don't want the people around me to be in the same situation as Mera was, after all. If Luna is gone, I will never have a personal servant again.'*

Luna insisted on coming, though. She wouldn't give up, no matter what. She even tied herself to the horse to force me to bring her along. Luna was insistent on watching me. There was no persuading her. She gripped my cape with a tight grip and exclaimed, "I must stay by your side even if it is dangerous, because I am your personal servant. So please let me stay by your side!"

*'And so, I ended up bringing Luna along, even though she wasn't exactly useful here, and I had no room to be thinking about taking care of her. But with her by my side, I was able to be less worried.'*

The ruins were inside the oasis. This was the first sight of green we'd seen in over dozens of days. There was a lake at the centre of the oasis. However, the lake wasn't large. I was really curious as to why there was a lake of water. The lake generously provided its surroundings and every generation of the nomads who came here everyday with life.

*'For safety purposes, I had an Earth Dragon carriage stay inside the oasis. If we succeed but then get no replenishments, then we'll have water here. Food isn't the most important thing in the desert. Worst case scenario, I'll kill another Earth Dragon. Water couldn't be replenished, though.'*

We had finished with our arrangements for our return. We only needed to worry about if we could use the arrangements now. I didn't arrange for a

substitute unit since I didn't have many men in the first place. I must succeed this time or I'll be doomed. As I've kept saying, this is a gamble with our lives.

I stood on a tall dune and looked at the yellow-sand ruins in the distance. I then looked down and asked the kid, "Is this where your tribesmen are trapped?"

Tarak translated my question and the kid nodded. I looked in that direction. It was a ruin of yellow sand which reminded me of Old Summer Palace. However, I could faintly see how it was once a city. Half of the city walls, which hadn't been destroyed by gusts of winds remained, as well as traces of roads and houses. The sides where the wind hit had basically crumbled, though. While it wasn't damaged on the other side, it looked the same as it did back then.

I could also see that people had used all sorts of things to surround it.

*'It was just as I surmised. They had surrounded the city, but they didn't kill the people inside. Of course, I'm not convinced that they're nice people. They were just waiting to snatch the kid from us before killing the people inside.'*

Otherwise, it would be a waste of energy to kill the people here. Plus, if the people were to take the map and destroy it along with themselves, then they'd get nothing, either. Thus, it was best to resolve things peacefully. With that said, if I were to break through the siege, it's still best if I send someone in to speak to them. If they mistake my intentions, then everything will be in vain.

I lowered my head down and asked the kid next to me, "Can you get in?"

Tarak paused and then asked, "Your Majesty, did you want him to go in and report that we were coming?"

I nodded and replied, "Yes. If they mistake us as enemies, then we'll get caught in a pincer attack. It's as I mentioned. It appears that there aren't too many people laying siege to the city here. Perhaps most of them went to kill us. Their campsites around the city are also separated, so it doesn't seem as though they have a way to contact each other. Or rather, they're competing with each other."

"Uhm. Your Majesty, I think that we are very likely to be able to break through successfully. The enemy is not tightly gathered around. To the contrary,

one gunpowder barrel will suffice. We just need to light up a single barrel. If we can break through from there, the entire situation will be in disarray. As long as we can create a bit of chaos, we will be able to use the opening to break the siege.”

I nodded. I don’t reckon this battle will be that difficult. It’s just that when I looked at the horizon, I couldn’t shake off the feeling that there was something there. I couldn’t see it clearly due to the overcast.

*‘Is that pile of stuff moving or am I imagining things? I don’t know what I saw. Perhaps it was just my imagination?’*

“Tarak, can you see something over there? It seems it’s coming our way.”

I pointed in its direction. Tarak squinted and then replied, “Sorry, Your Majesty, I do not see anything. Perhaps it is your imagination...”

I rubbed my eyes, but I still felt that overcast was thing was still there. I also felt it was getting closer, too. Tarak, however, didn’t see it.

*‘Could it be due to my eyes becoming hazy after being in the desert for so long? Or am I just imagining it?’*

“Don’t worry about it then. I changed my deployment, I’m putting the three Earth Dragons in three teams, to have them attack from left, right and front at the same time. We will regroup in the centre to break out of the siege from one side, while leading the people we need to rescue. Have the kid go in and report in now. Once you hear loud explosions and see a flare, have your people prepare to aid us. Take out your royal family emblems. Those that have it shining on their chest at night are our men!”

‘Whatever...’

‘My human senses are going to drag me down now.’

*‘I always remember that I’m not human but half-elf whenever I face a crisis. My eyesight is significantly superior to Tarak’s. That’s why I could see what he couldn’t. And that wasn’t my imagination. It was the most terrifying death god of the desert...’*

## Ch. 42

Launching an assault during the day isn't too effective. The best time to launch an attack is at night. Moreover, according to Tarak, it was going to be cloudy tonight. An attack launched late at night is destructive. Our explosions, fires and huge beasts will destroy those motley crews' confidence. The purpose of our charges using our Earth Dragons isn't to kill the enemy, but to break down their defence line. Our horse cavalry will then charge down one of the paths to their destination and attack the enemy. The three cavalry units will report back, informing us which point is the weakest and we will attack that point.

If there are no mishaps then this strategy is unbeatable.

Luna watched the kid run toward his tribesmen with excitement, despite the area being full of roadblocks set up by their enemies and themselves.

*'As he was able to come out, I don't think it'd be difficult for him to go back in. As long as we can work together perfectly from inside and outside, we won't have any issues.'*

"Men, rest up well. Tonight, we shall launch our attack! You still have about six hours to rest. Rest up after eating."

*'It's already sunset. Well, if we were in our original spot, then it would be sunset, but it was as if it was still noon right now in the desert. If we want to launch an attack, we must launch it at around one or two in the morning... To be honest, I'm a little nervous about that time, because it'll be a full-moon night in three days' time. I get more and more afraid of the moonlight as the night comes closer.'*

*'I don't think I'll have any problems tonight. If Tarak's prediction of the weather is correct, then we'll basically be enshrouded in darkness tonight.'*

I looked up at the clear sky and then looked at Tarak with uncertainty. Tarak was seated on the sand to one side, silently wiping his long sword. He then looked up at me to reveal a smile and said, "Your Majesty, please believe me. I have lived in the desert for a long time so I am very sensitive to changes in the weather. It will definitely be cloudy tonight. That I am certain of. Further, even

if it is not, our metal armour will blind the enemy.”

I nodded and then sat down next to him. The sand was still a little hot. I looked at the sky that had started to turn a little red and softly asked, “If you make it out alive this time, do you have any plans to confess to Nara?”

“What?!”

Tarak stiffened up and looked at me with a stunned look. His face that was slightly dark turned red as a prawn. He panicked and stuttered: “I... Lord Nara... I... I... confess what... Totally not... and... and... she should know...”

I looked at him and patted him on his shoulder, “She knows; but, if you don’t confess then she’ll pretend to be oblivious. I’m telling you this with my experiences in two marriages. If you don’t make it explicit, your relationship won’t change, even if you two are both aware that you like each other.”

“But... But Nara... She... Her dream is Karnashun... She has a dream. I can’t let her... for my sake...”

“That’s why I said, after this.” I nodded and then went on, “I’ll definitely leave you all in charge of this mine after this, which means that Karanshun would have obtained access to a big mine, not to mention the money I give you. Won’t Karanashun be the richest nation among the five nations of the desert when that time comes? Wouldn’t you have been the one to accomplish Nara’s dream in that case? Do you still not have the right to be with her after accomplishing that? Even if you don’t, would you be a burden to her if you two were together? What, you can’t serve Karnashun together just because you two are together?”

“Your Majesty, you...”

I pat him on the shoulder again then looked over to the ruins and said, “It’s beautiful to stay by her side, but being together doesn’t mean being restrained. Nara needs a helper and you can help her as her husband. Why must you be childhood friends? Keep that up and you’ll be eating the bitter fruit you, yourself, planted if Nara gets married to someone else. Look at us. We didn’t think about going in with our lives a few days ago, but here we are boldly putting our lives on the line. Life is short and nobody is certain about the future. If you can stay by her side, then stay by her side forever.”

*'Stay by her side if you can. If you can't, then stay by her side with another identity, just as Luna has done. If Luna could be with me, she would have a ring on her finger already, but she can't, so she chose to be my personal servant.'*

After a long silence, Tarak finally raised his head. While blushing slightly, yet determined, he nodded and firmly responded, "... I understand, Your Majesty. If I can make it back, I will definitely confess my feelings to Nara. If we can be together, I will stay by her side forever to protect her and assist her. When the time comes, I hope you can witness our wedding, Your Majesty."

"I will."

I patted him on his shoulder. But just when I went to stand up, Tarak grabbed me. He looked at me and revealed a doubtful gaze. He asked, "Your Majesty, did you just say you got married twice? Did you not just get married? How did it become twice? I did not attend your wedding. Did you re-marry?"

I paused for a moment, since I never expected him to ask this question. His reaction was too slow if you ask me. He only realised what I said now. I chuckled and replied: "No, I didn't re-marry, but had a second wedding. I have two Princesses. But I don't recommend you do that, or else... Two women fighting is seriously scary."

Tarak looked at me with a dumbfounded look. His eyes were full of astonishment.

*'It seems that me having two weddings was a heavy blow to him. I guess it's fair since it wasn't something this pure-young man could accept. It's fair. Tarak is a very pure boy.'*

I stood up and walked up to a tall dune. I looked down at the roadblocks below, as well as the groups of people who'd appear every now and then, and spaced out.

*'This was a short moment of tranquility in the desert. Actually, it might actually be how tranquil it was in the desert. It was as tranquil as when I stood on the top floor and looked at people going back and forth.'*

*'But this will soon become a killing zone, a field of chaos. Everything that takes place tonight will tear apart the entire desert. This will be the final turbulence I*

*go through since coming to the desert. I came here to the desert for that mine and the mine is right before me now. All I have to do is reach my hand out and grab it.'*

*'Socina City's team has been eliminated. I eliminated a team right off the bat. I've never even see any teams since then. I don't think there are any teams that are more dangerous anymore. Though I did kind of wrong the lord I've never met before, this was the result I desired.'*

*'Therefore, there's nothing to be sorry about. This is a place without rules and regulations. I don't have to worry if Freya said something back home while I'm here, since she'll only stall without my order. When I get back, Socina City won't have any bargaining chips left!'*

## Ch. 43

I felt that nightfall came too late. However, everything unfolded as Tarak said it would. When night started to fall, clouds that appeared out of nowhere, began to cover the sky. The bright moon and stars were covered by clouds. It really was pitch black. Not even I could see beyond a few metres. The only thing we could rely on was our memory and the reports our scouts brought back late at night. Our scouts returned to inform us of the enemy positions, but I had no idea where the two teams that split up were.

Tarak and Philes led one team each, leading the wing attacks, while Lorana and I led the team here. I only have just over ten people and an Earth Dragon with me. Based on our location during the day, we should be within distance to begin our charge now. The people inside had fires lit up. It was the only light in the darkness, which was also our best reminder.

Nobody discovered us, even though we didn't really care about being discreet or staying hidden. Nobody noticed our location, either.

*'I think it'd be more accurate to say that nobody cared about their rear. Should I describe the enemy as a motley crew or should I say that they didn't think anybody would attack them in the desert, despite not having heard back*

*from their own people?*’

I looked at the Earth Dragon rider next to me and quietly asked, “Earth Dragons, you ready?”

This young man chose to ride the Earth Dragon of his own volition. I initially intended to ride it myself, but Earth Dragon riders face a lot of danger. As the body of the Earth Dragon is so large, it becomes everyone’s target when it rampages. Guns might not be very accurate, but there’s no guarantee you won’t get caught by a bullet. Moreover, we don’t have reins for Earth Dragons, because they were supposed to pull the carriages, not enter combat. If the Earth Dragon goes out of control, you’re very likely to fall off the top.

My suggestion was, consequently, rejected. I really admire the young man’s courage for volunteering. It was his turn to charge, I saw his legs quiver. I handed him the Ignite and Explosion potions in my hands to him then looked up at his slightly stiff face, and told him, “It’s alright. Don’t be nervous. You just need to charge in and throw these things. Do you still remember how we stopped the Earth Dragons? You don’t need to engage the enemy in a fight. You can go to that place and wait for us to return once you’ve charged into the enemy’s formation and dismantled it.”

“Understood, Your Majesty.”

He nodded and then reacted as he wanted to puke, but he tried to hold it back. That was a sign that he was nervous. I know that, but I can’t swap him out for someone else now.

*‘Since you volunteered yourself, I can only wish you good luck.’*

I touched the protective talisman in front of my chest. The talisman was Nier’s gift for me. If Nier was here right now, she would be standing here with her long sword and strong gaze. Unfortunately, she’s not here right now. I’ve only got this protective talisman on me. It was enough, though.

This was enough for me to feel that she was here by my side.

It’s reassuring to have your loved one by your side when you’re looking to go die.

I gently grabbed hold of Luna’s hand. Luna was seated atop Lorana’s horse. I

looked at her with a solemn look and she froze for a moment. She then revealed a gentle smile and asked, "What is the matter, Your Majesty?"

"Are you scared?"

I found myself choking on my words. I originally had countless things to say, but in the end, I could only utter three empty words that made me feel awkward.

Luna looked at me and softly chuckled. Even though it was pitch black, Luna's smile could still seemingly shine with bliss and a holy light. She interlocked her fingers with mine and softly replied, "Yes."

"If you're scared, head back."

"I am scared that something might happen to you."

Luna tightly held my hand, looked toward the flame in the dark and resolutely continued, "Your Majesty, if there is no one next to you to stop you, you will definitely overextend yourself. I am scared that you will do something reckless, which is why I must be by your side. Your Majesty, you need someone to take care of you, no matter where you go."

"Am I as weak as you say?"

I smiled helplessly and then tugged the reins. I stopped for a moment and then made a high-pitched whistle with my mouth. The disgusting oppressing silence in the desert was shattered by my whistle. All the clouds in the sky seemed to be shocked, too. Then a strong gust of wind from out of nowhere blew them away.

The people in the camp seemed to be clueless as to what just happened. They even refused to go and check what happened. The people around the fire just stood up for a moment and then lazily sat back down. But they won't be sitting for long this time, because the Earth felt as though it was quaking before them. Flustered, they looked toward the direction of the sound in the darkness. The heavy sound was approaching them at a fast pace. Something huge then knocked away the pitiful roadblocks, while the roars that would irritate their ears slammed against their ears. They looked at the huge beast before them with blank expressions. They opened their mouths wide, but not a sound would

come out. It was as if a fire and intense explosion descended from the heavens, reducing them to bits and pieces.

The intense flames spread throughout the area of sand, swallowing up everything it came into contact with. The strong gust of wind and dry nature of the desert made the flames grow even bigger as though it was an invincible death god. Cries and shouts now filled the interior of the camp. The darkness was now bright, since the flames were burning brightly. The camps nearby also got affected. The people, who weren't originally on the same team, thought someone launched an attack taking advantage of the cover of the night. Therefore, they picked up their weapons and rushed over. They fired in the direction of the other camp without any aim. Those who were attacked thought they were the ones attacking, so the survivors returned fire without hesitation.

All of the camps around were thrown into a chaotic battle. The flames virtually burnt the clouds in the sky. The explosive sound of gun fire was going off non-stop, similarly to fried tofu crackling in the pan. All of this was accompanied by the sound of slaughter, roars and cries before death.

I drew my handgun.

*'I don't actually have many bullets, either. However, there wasn't much point in me fighting. I just needed to act as a flag. This was the final battle. We just need to win this battle and we'll be victorious in here. The first step of my dream shall finally take off. There's nothing left to hide at this point. My emblem of the Rosvenor Empire at my chest shined in the darkness.'*

*'I'm the prince of the Rosvenor Empire! I'm the next Emperor of the Rosvenor Empire! I want to tell the world, every single soul in the world, the things you fight for, everything you desperately wanted, not one of you will be able to defeat me, because I'm the most outstanding King among you all. I'm not a kid who only hides behind his mother. I'm the next Elven King, and the next Emperor of the empire!'*

We left nothing in the tank for the final battle. We didn't employ any strategy. We just needed to cut open a path, rush to the people ahead we needed to save and then kill our way out.

*'I once thought that the desert to the south was an incomparably carefree*

*place as though it was another world. But, between me and the ore I need right now is a sea of flames and a bunch of enemies. I just need to cross the sea of flames and slaughter all of my enemies!*

“Everyone, charge!!”

I didn’t need to give any command or coordinate anything.

My men drew their only remaining weapon. Their elven blades shined, revealing all of their determined faces. The horses neighed toward the heavens and kicked up sand. The horses that shook the heavens charged toward the massive flame and toward the fierce winds without hesitation!

‘Everyone, charge!’

## Ch. 44

This charge felt too easy. Perhaps it was because we had defeated their main forces already. The remainder must’ve been bandits of the desert and some sly company who were powerless before our attacking cavalry. There were some elites, who held their weapons and tried to counterattack, but they were all cut down by us.

We swiftly crossed through the sea of fire and the sand swept up by a fierce gust of wind hit us. The fire was bending due to the strong wind. But at the same time, we didn’t have to hold our breath thanks to the strong wind.

We crossed through the fire and corpses similarly to phantoms and headed toward our final destination. We didn’t face any strong resistance on the entire way. I was a little nervous to the point I had a sad and dreary feeling, but I now had an odd type of feeling. I lost as if I had just come to the desert. I never expected it to be so simple.

*‘If I knew it was going to be this simple, what the heck was I fretting about earlier?’*

It was just that the fire on the ground and the ruins slowed our horses down. We had to take some detours while heading to the centre. Despite the road

being long, the twists and turns couldn't put out the confidence and composure rising in my chest. I truly felt that my dream was going to be realised just like that.

*'But, is the wind that's blowing right now getting stronger and stronger or what?'*

"Your Majesty, do you feel that this wind is a little too strong?"

Lorana, who was next to me, frowned. I felt the same way. I didn't think it was strong at first, but it had not gotten so strong that we couldn't open our eyes. I initially thought it was strong due to our speed, but it now felt rough even when we stood still.

Lorana looked at me with a serious look as she covered her nose and mouth with her mask. She looked at me and in a tense tone said, "I feel that it's a little dangerous. Your Majesty, this might be a sandstorm. If it's a sandstorm, we'll be completely split up. We must find those people as soon as possible, and then swiftly return to our camp. We'll be done for if we get caught in a sandstorm out here."

"Ah..."

*'I've only seen sandstorms in the past, but the sandstorms in the city can't compare at all. After I grew up, forests were formed to guard against natural disasters and to protect the environment so I never saw sandstorms again. However, I often heard about how scary sandstorms in the desert were. Compared to bandits and jackals of the desert, the most frightening thing in the desert was sandstorms that could hit at any moment. They could suck up an entire team's things.'*

*'I can't believe we're faced with a sandstorm now. But that wasn't all. We still had groups of enemies ahead. We'd be considered lucky if we could stay on the ground when it starts blowing fiercely. We need to cut open a path. The scariest part was that we can't possibly see our comrades when the storm hits.'*

I had split the team into three teams! Under normal circumstances, we should've stopped at the centre and waited for all three teams to regroup, but we were out of time to wait for them. We could only pray that they had already arrived and were waiting for us. If we're not together then the sandstorm will

completely separate us.

We can't support each other if we get swallowed up by the sandstorm. Even those next to you will be blown away. When that happens, not only will our vision be impaired, but we'll also be right in among our enemies. We won't be able to tell if the team we suddenly run into is our team or not. By the time we can see, we'd be only five or six steps away from each other. The enemies' sword will already be poised and ready to strike me by then.

*'Sandstorms are extremely scary. I'm not afraid of anything right now, but a sandstorm could truly blow away my dream right in front of me.'*

"Everyone, take down the enemy and reach our destination as fast as possible! Once we get there, we'll grab the people and leave immediately. Don't wait any longer. If we wait and run into a sandstorm, we'll be in danger. Take the people straight back to our campsite! You, come here! Yes, you!"

I pulled a soldier over. I honestly didn't care who it was. He looked at me with a stunned look, completely clueless as to what I wanted. I pulled down the reins on my horse. Lorana read my mind and suddenly passed Luna into his arms. Luna cried out. Before she realised it, I had firmly strapped her to the horse saddle.

The buckle was originally intended to be used to hang swords or other weapons from, but Luna was now hanging from it. Luna couldn't resist against Lorana's strength, while I didn't show any signs of relaxing on my face.

*'If there's danger, I must send Luna out.'*

"Take Luna back to our camp. Do not come out until the sandstorm blows over. It's a blind spot over there, so I don't think anybody is likely to come over. You must keep Luna safe."

I pat him on his shoulder and then stroked Luna's face. Luna yelled loudly and tightly grabbed onto my hand. I looked at her face and pulled her hand off. Separations during these moments should be tender and painfully decisive. Our tension had been reduced by a lot and I believed that we would win for sure when I brought Luna along, but this sandstorm that came out of nowhere has messed up all of my plans.

*'I can't put Luna in danger.'*

I don't have any time for lovey-dovey words nor is there time for us to show our affection for each other. I just want to get her out, right now. I want to get her to safety. All the affectionate stuff, love and whatever can wait until after she gets out alive. I can only stay by her side if she makes it out alive.

"Goodbye, Luna."

I turned around. If I took another glimpse at her, I might feel a little sorrow. The strong wind continued to get stronger and stronger, to the point where I couldn't hear the sound of the horse behind me leaving. In fact, I could barely hear Lorana's voice when she was right next to me. The strong winds got stronger and stronger similarly to a tsunami of sand. Even my elite battle steeds were neighing and trembling in the fierce wind.

We felt we were a little late. Despite having done our best to move forward, we were now at the border of the sandstorm.

*'I don't know what we'll be faced with next but I don't have any intention of retreating now. I've already considered the question. Everybody's hope rests on my shoulders. I've come here, so I won't retreat!'*

"Tie everybody together with a rope. I might not have any means of contacting the others, but we can't let ourselves be separated. If we're separated any more, we'll be done for. I can still remember the route. Can you see the flame over there? The three clusters of fire is the signal we agreed on..."

Honestly, I felt like the signal was just garbage now. I have no way of telling if it's a cluster of fire inside of a huge fire, but that must be the real thing because I could vaguely see the tent nearby. If there aren't any problems, we might be able to leave with everyone when the sandstorm covers the entire place...

We tied ourselves together and galloped in that direction. This time, however, we were moving slower. Our horses were slowed by the fierce wind.

"Your Majesty, advancing with the wind blowing against us is going to be a little hard."

"That's fine... The wind will be behind us when we leave."

I chuckled and then tightened up my hoodie before leading my men over.

‘Uhm.’

‘I don’t think I’ll be able to leave before the sandstorm comes, as this tent was, indeed, what we were searching for. Those were, indeed, the people we needed to rescue.’

‘Outside right now, though, is a large group of people who’ve laid siege. If we don’t kill them then we have no way of entering.’

“Brothers. Let’s try it out today. We’ll launch a night raid using the Earth Dragon for the first time. It’ll be our first assault after we’ve used up all of our bullets and ran out of provisions. We’re going to start a slaughter in the desert next! Everyone, our targets are everyone but those in the tent! Slay them all!! Charge!”

## Ch. 45

We were basically foot soldiers now. Our horses were wobbling and struggling to move forward when faced with the sandstorm they had never encountered before. Even though they were battle steeds, their instincts encouraged them to flee. We abandoned our steeds after defeating the enemy team ahead and walked on foot to meet up with tribe inside. It was just as I initially thought. Other than us, our other two teams didn't make it to the destination.

I don't know what those two teams encountered. Before my eyes was nothing but sand. The sandstorm was now darker than night time. All I could see was waves of sand. It was as if we were surrounded by metres of pale yellow sand. We couldn't see each other's faces despite being tied together and holding hands.

The elder of the tribe said something in a hasty voice. However, Tarak isn't here, so I couldn't understand a word. Lorana expressed that she was willing, but unable to help. She could only understand the fundamental language of the desert. These tribesmen spoke a language she had never heard before. I had no clue what he was saying nor did I have any interest in listening to him any further. I focused on locating our camp from memory.

*'We must return to our camp.'*

Our camp is one of the places nearby where we can take shelter from the storm. I think the two teams will return to the camp when they enter and find nobody. Maybe they've already gone back. It's fine either way. I just want to see them at our camp. In my opinion, I don't think there's any way the enemy can harm them. If my soldiers die in the desert, they must've died to the sandstorm, not in the hands of those punching bags.

I have faith in my men. They're formidable fighters. Natural disasters, however, aren't something that they can win against. Of course, I believe that they can definitely win against this sandstorm, or at least, return to the camp.

I have no spare time to be worrying about them right now, though, because I need to lead this group of weak elderly back to our camp. Right now I'm facing

a monstrous fire and sand I can't even see. It was as if God ripped the area apart with his hands, ripping these man-made toys apart and then tossing them around everywhere.

I finally understood why there were only tiny areas left in these ruins. Humanity's man-made toys just appear insignificant in this sort of sandstorm. These human ruins were destroyed by the wind. The only area still standing was the one that was on the lee side. But looking at it now, the area still standing can't provide shelter from the wind.

"Your Majesty! Be careful!!"

Someone grabbed me around my waist and tossed me onto the ground. Before I realised it, I felt something burnt in front of my forehead. A burning piece of timber zipped straight past my face. It immediately burnt my hood and even my hair. I spat out a mouthful of sand. Lorana stood up from behind me and looked at the flying objects in front of us. In a concerned voice she loudly shouted, "Your Majesty, we have no idea where we should be heading toward. We've lost our direction!"

I rubbed my hair in front of me and then shouted back, "Yes, but we must continue forth. We need to get out, no matter where we go! We must get out! Are we going to just die here after coming all the way here?! We must get out!!"

"Whhooooaaa!!!"

As soon as I finished, a group of foot soldiers rushed out from my side. They wore the standard attire in the desert with thick cloth covering their mouths and a rectangle-shaped hat. They rushed toward me with curved sabres. As I previously said, if you can see your enemy in a sandstorm, then that must mean they're right in front of you. I desperately stepped back. My loyal guard behind me loyally charged forward to intercept the enemies. But I still felt a chill in my bones when the violent soldier swung his sword at me.

I looked down and saw that my shirt had been completely cut open, leaving just my undershirt underneath. If I didn't have the Earth Dragon Undershirt, my chest would probably resemble my shirt right now. My guards fought the enemies in the storm. Everyone was staggering around. As a matter of fact, the

fight looked a little comical. Not much blood sprayed into the air when wounds were cut open, as they were instantly filled with sand.

It took more effort than usual to kill the enemies before us. However, before we could catch our breath, another group rushed over from our right hand side. The tribesmen behind me hopelessly cried out one after another. My guards rushed over to intercept the enemies again. Lorana didn't hold back at all. There were no survivors wherever she passed.

"Big sis?"

"Tch. I feel a little rusty after not using my skills in so long." The group of enemies were slain by us, too. My guards seemed to have lost all their fighting strength and struggled to even stand straight in the wind. Blood was dripping from Lorana's abdomen, but it shouldn't be a severe wound. Lorana used a length of cloth to wrap the wound, as a means of stopping the bleeding. She then clenched her teeth and said, "Don't stay here any longer, Your Majesty. We have no strength left to fight."

"All right. Let's head in one direction. Let's head that way. I remember that this is the place I saw from the dune. We'll be able to return to our camp if we follow this route."

I looked at the pillar in front of me. This pillar was the tallest pillar I saw from above back then. If we go in this direction, we'll be able to return to our camp. Judging from the position of the pillar, we should be about several hundred metres away from our camp above. However, these few hundred metres were as hard as climbing to heaven from my perspective.

That dune is on the lee side. We'll be safe behind it. We just need to reach that side.

"Your Majesty!! Another group of people are coming at us from behind! I think we will soon come into contact! I think the sounds we made attracted their attention! It's a group of cavalry!"

"What are we going to do, Your Majesty? We're on foot now and we have the tribesmen behind us. If we don't abandon them, there's no way we'll get away."

"How can I abandon them? If I abandon them then everything I've done up

until now will be for nothing! It wasn't easy to get to this stage. I can't abandon them! Guards!!"

After I shouted, my guards behind me came up to stand around me and looked at me. Despite being in the middle of a sandstorm, their eyes were full of determination as before. Despite us being surrounded, in peril, out of ammunition and out of provisions, they didn't show fear.

"I'll have to ask you guys to hold them back. Once we get out, you can orderly retreat."

I looked at my soldiers with my teeth clenched tightly as I gave the order I was most reluctant to give. Telling them to stay behind in this situation is the same as killing them. No ammunition, no provisions and no horses. That's the highway to death.

But that's the only way we can get out. The only way we can leave safely is if we have people stall them.

"Understood."

My guards didn't question me, though. There was no change in their gaze. They drew their long swords. Though they were staggering, they rushed toward the cavalry unit with nothing but determination.

The cavalry in pursuit must be a unit familiar with the desert, since they could still charge at us on their horses in the desert. They must be elites.

My foot soldiers aren't locals. They don't have guns. All they've got are their long swords and worn out bodies. However, they rushed toward the cavalry unit without any hesitation.

I must leave.

"Let's hurry and get out of here."

I looked at Lorana next to me. I choked. I didn't want to look back. I didn't want to look back. If I did, I wouldn't be able to take another step away.

*'Sorry, my warriors.'*

*'I will never forget you.'*

## Ch. 46

*'After abandoning all of our men and resources, I only had Lorana next to me and the tribesmen behind me. I don't know how far we've gone but it was basically peaceful. There were only large flames and bits of flying remains. There were no enemies sighted. If enemies did come at us right now, I would've obediently surrendered, regardless of how weak they might have been. Lorana is the only one left who can fight and she's injured, so basically, I have no fighting power at this stage. All we could do now was pray that we wouldn't be discovered by any enemies.'*

*'Well, I think running into any enemies would be a better way to put it. But even if it was a skirmish, I had no way of retaliating.'*

*'If we weren't hit with the sandstorm, I would still have the combined might of my three teams that split off, and we would've been able to defeat our pursuers just now with ease. But that's impossible now. I never considered what we'd do if we were to get swallowed by a sandstorm. I never thought that the sandstorm I'd been concerned about the entire time would hit me in the face at our final battle. If I knew about it sooner, I wouldn't have split my group up.'*

*'I honestly never expected to find myself in such a pathetic situation this time. Every single time we got closer to the goal, we ran into one thing after another. What seemed to be a simple task became so arduous. We fended off a wave of enemies and I then abandoned my own guards for these tribesmen, who were meaningless existences to me. I wouldn't have done so if it wasn't for the remaining half of the map they had. All of this was akin to a nightmare one wouldn't dare believe.'*

*'Was it worth it?'*

*I looked at the sea of yellow sand and wiped my eyes. I asked myself if it was really worth it without thinking.*

*'How much had I given up? I gave up virtually half of my Guard Unit. If the other teams that I've lost contact with didn't suffer any losses, then I would be*

*left with just half of my Guard Unit. I brought a hundred people here, and yet only fifty are returning. Most of them died in the battle that was comparable to waves to the shore. I lost half of my Guard Unit for a single map. Every single one of them was a weapon I diligently raised and they couldn't be replaced. I sacrificed half of them for a mine that wasn't absolutely necessary.'*

*'Was it really worth it?'*

*'How am I going to face the rest of them even if I manage to return safely? How am I going to face the families who were left behind by the soldiers who came with me? What did they sacrifice their lives for? Was it to protect me or some greater dream?'*

*'Neither. It was purely because of an idea of mine. Just for a mine. Just for my dream of becoming the Emperor. Actually, it's not even my dream but the dream I wanted to flaunt.'*

*'Was everything I did worth it?'*

"Big sis, I want to ask you a question."

Lorana pressed her hand on her wound by her abdomen and struggled to reply, "Go ahead."

It appears I was slightly too optimistic about her wound. Despite being a minor wound, it seems that trudging through the storm made it worse. Lorana's expression started to look grim, but she stayed behind me without taking a step away.

"Do you think that everything I did was worth it? I sacrificed so many of my men for a mine and caused you to get injured, too. Was everything I did worth it? If we were to consider it mathematically, is what I've gained enough to console the soldiers who died?"

I don't know what my voice sounded like in the sandstorm. My weak voice virtually disappeared into the winds similarly to my powerless body. I don't know if Lorana heard me, either; but, she paused for a moment as though she was thinking about it and then replied, "Your Majesty, sometimes, success isn't measured by losses but what's gained."

"I understand that." I nodded and went on, "But I want to know if what I

gained this time counts as a success. What did my fallen soldiers sacrifice themselves for?"

Lorana didn't hesitate this time; Instead, she immediately responded to me, "They got a qualified King."

She grabbed my cloak and elaborated, "You Majesty, you need to understand that the soldiers, who came with you, didn't follow you because of Elizabeth or Vyvyan, but because of you, yourself. You're the one that they wished to serve. Your safety, your thoughts and your future are what they want to realise most. I saw your transformation during this journey to the desert. I believe that they, too, saw it. You began to give orders as a King would. You began to stand at the forefront when your men were lost and tired. That's enough. Your Majesty, the soldiers that served Elizabeth over a decade ago were the same. To your men, they found a master worth their loyalty on this mission. Their loyalty didn't go to waste nor was it tarnished. Their loyalty has meaning as long as you live, even if that means their bodies rot and tombs crumble. They found a qualified King, while you managed to prove yourself. You have managed to leave Elizabeth and Vyvyan's shelter to stand on your own. Is that not enough?"

Lorana's voice was cut off several times by the noisy wind, but I was still able to understand her.

*'My men's loyalty wasn't for nothing. I must ensure their loyalty was devoted to a goal. Since they devoted their loyalty to me, I shall ensure that they feel honoured for their loyalty. Perhaps I'm not yet mature, but will they be proud that they chose me after this?'*

*'A King isn't a higher being at birth, but an individual who stays at the forefront when everyone is tired, in pain and hopeless.'*

*'I think that Mommy Elizabeth is worshipped and treated as such a great figure, because she stepped up when the country had fallen, her family was slain and when everyone had given up. She raised the flag that commanded everyone and never put it back down.'*

She let those who served her feel honoured. As a result, nobody would choose to betray her. The repayment for their loyalty isn't infinite wealth or higher statuses, but the glory and honour one feels for their devoted loyalty.

“Do you think they felt honoured this time then in your opinion?”

“You didn’t back down when faced with danger. You didn’t quit when things were hopeless. You didn’t lose your composure when things got chaotic. Your Majesty, your men witnessed everything you did. Should I say that you’re unmistakably Elizabeth’s child or unmistakably Vyvyan’s child? Or maybe, unmistakably *their* child? You possess Elizabeth’s decisiveness and courage, but also Vyvyan’s wisdom and kindness. Your Majesty, I am honoured to serve you.”

Lorana’s voice sounded very brisk but I could hear the sound of a sword being drawn from its scabbard.

Yeah, I saw it.

A dark shadow appeared ahead of us in the sandstorm.

My heart stayed calm, though, because I had no plans left. It was hopeless, so I didn’t plan to run this time.

I touched the protective talisman at my chest.

*‘I feel that I’m still a kid that hasn’t grown up. I require someone to protect me at my side. Nier didn’t come. It appears this is my cemetery.’*

*‘Luna should be safe, however. I just won’t get to see her again.’*

“Your Majesty, I’m satisfied to have been able to accompany you here. Sometimes, I envy seeing you humans die a death worth a legacy.” Lorana leaned on her sword. She looked at me and revealed a weak smile. She then continued, “For an elf, a long life can be a sad thing, as it’s shameful to speak of a life a hundred years long with no accomplishments to your name... That’s why I chose to come to humanity to learn some new things. I don’t regret accompanying you here. Not everybody truly lived. As their teacher, I have no regrets dying to protect Elizabeth and Vyvyan’s child. And to die for your own dream is an extremely rare opportunity for elves. I need to thank you for giving me this opportunity.”

“Lorana...”

“Go, Your Majesty. Take another route out. Given the magnitude of this storm, be careful and you won’t be detected. I’m the number one

swordswoman of the continent after all. If I can't hold out until you leave, I've truly aged."

Lorana laughed heartily and then drew her long sword. The sand swept upwards and then was blown away by her speed that was akin to a tornado taking life after life. Lorana looked at me with her head tilted. She chuckled. She looked at me as a mother looking at her son and in a gentle voice told me, "Your Majesty, work hard. You must become a King we don't regret serving and can be proud of! You must become the son that Elizabeth and Vyvyan can be proud of..."

## Ch. 47

I didn't leave. The sandstorm had slowly calmed down. The storm came quick and left quickly. It only lasted for a few hours. The wind whistling next to my ear gradually quietened down and the sun slowly came up behind me. The sun overtook the darkness of the sandstorm in the end, but nothing ahead of us had changed. The black cavalry unit didn't rush at us. However, their blades that were aimed downward, meant that they didn't intend to be friendly.

Lorana stood in front of me and watched them with a cold look with her sword in hand. Though lots of blood was trickling from her wound and despite her face turning paler and paler, the killing intent she emitted from her body didn't diminish.

She told me to leave.

But I didn't.

"Your Majesty, didn't I tell you to leave?"

Lorana looked at me, who stood in place, refusing to move. I passed the map Tarak gave me to the elder of the tribe and then drew my handgun from my waist. I stood next to Lorana. I chuckled and explained, "There's no point in running anymore. If they make it to me, I'd rather die fighting than die running. I am Elizabeth's son, after all."

“If you die, Vyvyan really will annihilate this entire world, you know?”

“Let her destroy it then. I’ll be dead anyway, so I’d have no lingering feelings for this world. Actually, I think that we would’ve been rescued if I called Mommy Vyvyan before.”

“Wouldn’t you still be a kid hiding in his mother’s arms, one that waits for his mom to come to his rescue when something happens then?” Lorana laughed loudly and then scrubbed my head a little roughly. She continued, “Your Majesty, you’re no longer a kid. Congratulations. But I do hope that you can live on.”

“If we can just kill all these people, I’ll be able to live.”

I reloaded my revolver one bullet at a time with my final remaining bullets.

*‘Six bullets. If I don’t miss, I’ll be able to kill six people. There are about thirty of them, which means twenty four will remain, which I’ll leave to Lorana. Alright, I’ll kill one fifth of them, while Lorana can kill the rest. Looking at it this way, we still have hope.’*

I smiled helplessly.

*‘I don’t know why, but I’m randomly confident when I’m faced with a hopeless situation right now.’*

“I’m honoured to fight alongside you, Your Majesty.”

“Same goes for me.”

Somebody suddenly pat me on my back. I looked back and saw the elder holding two sheets of paper, which he then solemnly handed to me. This was what I gave up so much for. This was where the mine was located. It wasn’t actually a natural mine but actually the last heritage left behind by the ancient empire. The metal was buried. I don’t know what for, but they never got to use it for what it was intended for. Perhaps the adventurer got swept up in the sandstorm here and coincidentally saw the buried treasure when he landed. after the sand covering it was blown away.

That attracted a group of people putting their lives on the line for it, to come here where there are no laws and killed others. That turned this sea of yellow

sand into a hell in the mortal realm. It became a place where humans' blood became a sea of blood as though it was the source of water in the desert. If flowers, grass, rivers, birds and animals were to grow here many years later, the flower petals would be covered in blood, too.

I grinned. My dream was finally in my hands. I could finally say I had gotten my hands on everything I wanted. But none of this was meaningful right now. I had obtained what I wanted, but had no way of taking it out of here. It was a valuable treasure, but was now just two sheets of scrap paper in my hands. If I had obtained this a few days ago, I'd be on the way back to Troy City right now.

Things change.

I placed the two sheets at my chest where Nier's protective talisman she gave me was. I suddenly felt something sticky and something prick me. I pulled my hand out and saw blood on my hand. I looked down to find that I had a wound where the collar of my undershirt had been cut open. I didn't even realise it. I had kept the talisman there the entire time, but it had now been cut into two.

*'Does that count as it having fulfilled its purpose? Nier will probably scold me for ruining the talisman she made me when I get back though. Sorry, Nier, but you might not get the chance to scold me anymore. There's Lucia. too. She was always by my side yet I hurt the girl over and over again. I might not be able to accompany her anymore.'*

*'The time I spent with Lucia was truthfully too short...'*

*'I want to live...'*

*'I really want to live. I've never wanted to live so badly in my life before. I could seemingly see Nier go up on her toes in the church. I could see her every eyelash that are akin to timekeepers before me. I could seemingly see Lucia's dance in the sea of flowers. Her smile in the sea of flowers made everything around her look bland in comparison. I wanted to return to them. I wanted to live. I've never wanted to live so much. I found my reason to live and the value of living here. I want to continue living here. I want to spend time at my loved ones' sides. I want to return to their sides!'*

I pressed my hand firmly on the necklace at my chest.

*'Maybe I should call for Mommy Vyvyan. Mommy Vyvyan is an almighty being that can do anything to me. I believe that she could get me out of here in an instant if she appeared. Vyvyan wouldn't blame me, either. In fact, she would be very glad to see me safe. This incident won't change anything. Does anybody even care how they die in this place without laws and regulations?'*

*'It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what others say. Everything is fine as long as I can stay by my loved ones. I'm not afraid to die. I now know how simple it is to die. But I've also come to understand that it's even more difficult to live for the sake of living.'*

*'At least my view of life won't let me do that. My dream won't let me do that. I saw Nier's determined gaze when she pushed me away one last time. If I did that then I would've disappointed her...'*

*'But... but....'*

I tightly gripped the necklace. The tip of the necklace stabbed my hand. I felt a warm liquid slowly coursed down my hand...

*'I want to live...'*

*'I want to live...'*

*'I want to live...'*

*'I want to live...'*

*'I want to live!!!!'*

*'I don't care. I don't care what anyone says about me. I want to go back now. I even want to get on my knees to beg for mercy and hand over everything. I just want to go back. I just want to return to my loved ones' sides, no matter what it takes! No matter what it takes! I want to live! I want to live!!!'*

*'I must live! I'm a soon-to-be father. I can't die before my child comes to this world. If I let that happen, I'd be the same as my father!! I want to live! I want to see my child! I want to see my wife!'*

*"Your Majesty?"*

Lorana looked at me, who took his necklace out. I looked at the necklace. I don't know how hideous my expression looked. I just knew that the necklace

before me looked as though it was bending.

I looked at the necklace, clenched my teeth tightly and declared, “I want to live!”

“I know, but... Your Majesty, that team... is the lord of Socina City’s team...”

## Ch. 48

The cavalry stopped in front of us. They didn’t strike at us; instead, they surrounded us and kept quiet as guards would. They didn’t chase the fleeing tribesmen, either; focusing purely on surrounding us, instead. Lorana and I watched them tensely. Regardless of what the case is, Socina City’s relationship with us outside is very good. However, we’re not friends here and I secretly came here to snatch their mine, not to mention that I killed their people as well. They’re still a threat to us right now, so we can’t let our guard down.

A man who seemed to be a protocol officer walked up to us when we were exchanging glances. He looked at me and gave a deep bow before politely asking, “May I ask if you are the prince of the Rosvenor Empire, Prince Troy Galadriel Rosvenor?”

I looked at him and felt a little contradicted. I wasn’t sure if I should reveal my identity, though they definitely know who I am, and hence, their question. They wouldn’t have just pulled someone over to ask if he was the Prince. That would be disrespecting the royal family, a crime punishable by decapitation.

“That’s right.”

After wrestling with myself for a while, I decided to admit my identity. It’s pointless to be hiding my identity right now. If I get killed for denying it, then there goes everything.

The protocol officer nodded before kneeling down on one knee on the sand. The cavalry around us also dismounted and knelt down on one knee. He loudly announced, “I apologise for my rudeness! It is a great honour to meet you, Your Majesty!!”

I looked at the group in front of me dumbfounded.

*'I didn't think these guards from Socina City were a group that respected the royal family. It seems that they won't harm me. Perhaps they're not my enemies and can lead me out safely? Am I in luck or is Socina here to snatch it for themselves, except that they're late?'*

"Your Majesty, our city's lord, Lord Karana Dominique Von Testersmill, wishes to invite you to see her for a chat."

The protocol officer made an invitational hand gesture. I smiled.

*'It would seem that it has come to this in the end. I don't know how much she knows but it would appear that she knows what I'm cooking in my pot right now. That said, I really admire and respect this woman. To take the risk of coming here personally as a woman, I would consider her an ambitious lord.'*

*'Guess there's good reason she's a dreamer with a dream completely inappropriate for this era. Actually, I'd say that she, too, is an action taker, who's competent at taking action. She's relatively scary. If we let her continue in this fashion, she might really be able to raise a red flag in the future.'*

I gave a nod and followed the protocol officer to head up front. Their medic helped Lorana heal her wound. But I'm not so sure that a human can treat an elf's wound. I just wanted them to help Lorana stop the bleeding. The rest can be dealt with using the elven spring water in my camp.

The protocol officer went up to a horse carriage. The horse carriage pulled by two horses was tightly sealed. I couldn't see the person inside whatsoever. The protocol officer didn't intend to let me into the carriage, either. He knocked on the door and softly reported, "My lord, his Majesty has arrived..."

"Oh? Is that right?" A clear yet cold laugh came from inside. Please allow me to describe it like so because when I first heard her voice, it was akin to seeing melted ice course down a snowy mountain, yet at the same time similar the cold winds at the peak, yet venerable as amethyst. She definitely comes from the North. She's graceful, noble and calm.

"Please allow me to speak to you separated by the carriage. I do not wish to let you see my face."

I didn't know which way she faced to speak, so it made me feel really awkward. I looked at the horse carriage in front of me. I went to speak, but then hesitated for a moment before saying, "That's fine. But I want to know why you don't want to let me see you."

"Because I did something wrong and cannot face you. I did something wrong this time, so I cannot face you. I am actually kneeling in the horse carriage as I speak to you right now. It is up to you whether you believe me or not."

A gentle laugh came from inside. I paused for a moment before replying, "You don't need to kneel. I just want to know what you did wrong that you can't face me."

She laughed from inside and then solemnly responded "I shall admit my wrong then. Please hand the treasure map you have to me."

I clenched my teeth.

*'It seems that she knows everything. She's no run-of-the-mill lord. They don't call her "The North's Elizabeth" for no reason. I bet she figured out all of our plans already. That map that led us here might've been her work for all we know!'*

"What are you talking about...?"

I tried to deny it but she cut me off with her laughter. I could just imagine the smug and proud look on her face as she laughed. If she was a dog, her tail would be a perfect fan right now. She laughed for a while before stopping and then spoke as if she was trying to hold in her laughter, "Your Majesty, please do not hide it any more. Are you saying that you still do not understand who the team you defeated belonged to?"

"Did you plan all this?"

"Not exactly. That team did not belong to me. They belonged to the opposing faction. That does not matter, though. To the contrary, I should thank you. I was the one who discovered the secret of this group first, among all in the desert. However, if I went straight to them, they would never hand it to me. Therefore, I wanted them to exchange it for something, and that was their lives. As such, I spread the news, so that everyone would surround this place. As a result, they

became willing to exchange the map for their lives. I did not need to do anything in the desert thereafter. All I had to do was wait for someone to come out with the map.”

*‘Her laughter indicated she was pleased with herself. But she had the right to be proud of herself. She perfectly coordinated one stratagem with another set of interlocking stratagems. So perfect I was speechless. I thought I found a method myself, but I unwittingly became her pawn. Her intelligence is far too frightening. I bet Freya would feel as though she met a comrade if she was here right now.’*

“I just never thought that you would be the one we ended up finding. If I did not see the emblem on your chest, I would have committed a mistake that would destroy all of Socina. But this is good, is it not? Your Majesty, you hand the map in your hand to me and I shall ensure that you and your people are safely escorted out of the desert. Your Majesty, you stalled my envoy while coming here to find the mine. You sure are ambitious. Furthermore, not only did you find it, you even came here. Your Majesty, my respect for you knows no bounds.”

“And yet you want to take the map I worked so hard for?!”

“You could choose to not give it to me.” She removed her smile and then continued, “I will not make things hard for you, either. However, do you think that you could return safely if others attack you or you run into another skirmish? I will not harm you, but I can notify every one of your location.”

“Are you threatening me?!”

“Your Majesty, make no mistake. This is no-man’s land. There are no laws regulating it. I am treating you courteously as a vassal out of respect for you.”

I clenched my teeth. She was right. I had no argument for what she said. Nobody would know if she killed me here and nobody would say a word. She just needed to kill all of us. Plus, they definitely could.

“Now, Your Majesty, please make your decision. I trust that you will make the right choice, given how smart you are. I can promise you that if you hand me the map, I will do my utmost best to make things to your benefit when we trade. Are you still hesitant now?”

## Ch. 49

“Your Majesty!!”

As soon as I got to the entrance of the camp, a body leapt at me, crashing straight into my arms and almost knocking me off the dune. I wobbled and then hugged Luna, who leapt at me. Luna’s familiar and soothing scent released itself in my arms as if the brightest flower was blooming in my arms.

“Your Majesty! Did you get hurt?!”

From my embrace, Luna looked up with a shocked expression. She reached her shaky hands up to touch the wound below my neck. I felt a cold prick on my nerves. I shook my head. I hugged her and softly replied, “I’m fine, Luna. I’m fine. It’s just a little scratch.”

“Your Majesty, you still need to treat your wound despite that!” Luna quickly ripped open my collar at the neck and bit my wound. I could feel Luna licking my wound and sucking the sand sitting on it. I could feel my warm blood pour out from the wound again. Luna sucked on my wound with all her might and then spat the blood and sand out to one side. She then took out a handkerchief from her shirt and pressed it on my wound.

I tightly grabbed hold of Luna’s hand and looked at her. I stroked her lips and she raised her head up to look at me with her teary eyes. She quivered as she said, “Your Majesty... I beg you... Please do not abandon me next time. Please do not abandon me... Please... I am so worried when I am not by your side. I was so worried about you... If you did not make it back... If you did not make it back... How... How... How would I continue living...?”

“If I don’t make it back, you must live on well.”

I stroked Luna’s head then bent down to gently kiss her lips. I could taste some of the sand and blood on her lips. That was the taste my wound left on her lips. I tasted my wound and the soothing fragrance in Luna’s mouth. I tasted her love for me, as well as my love for her. Luna closed her eyes and gently sucked me as though she desired me. The two of us were locked tightly in each

other's embrace with the feeling of excitement of making it through a crisis, in addition to our love for each other. We tasted each other's love as if we were experiencing the most beautiful love in this world.

We released each other and then Luna asked with concern, "Your Majesty, where is Miss Lorana?"

*'Aren't you a little late? But I get it. I'm several times more important than Lorana to Luna.'*

I pointed behind me and replied, "I had someone take care of her. They're on their way here now. Pack up our stuff and get ready to set out. Oh, right, how many of our people came back?"

"The two teams that split off both came back with no losses. They immediately returned when they reached the camp and saw no one."

I was relieved to hear Luna's answer.

*'Philes and Tarak were thinking well. They both made the most correct decision. It appears that I didn't lose too many men then. I can take home over one-hundred men as it stands at present and the wounded have already left safely. That means I only lost a bit over thirty men.'*

*'I can accept the loss. We just need to return and recuperate, and we'll recover our strength. We're fortunate we didn't lose the entire unit and got something out of the journey.'*

"Your Majesty, who did you ask?"

"Socina's people..." I paused for a bit. I didn't know if I should tell Luna about giving the map to Karana. But after some deliberation, I thought there was no point in hiding it. I looked at Luna and informed her, "I handed the map we found to them, and as repayment, they will safely escort us back to the city."

I thought Luna would be shocked and scold me. I thought she'd criticise me. But she didn't say anything. Instead, she revealed a relieved smile, looked at me and told me, "It is good that you can return to Troy City safely. That treasure map or whatever is nowhere near as important as you. I am glad you can return home safely, Your Majesty. It is great that you can return home."

I stroked her head and chuckled. I responded, "Yeah. I want to return as soon as possible, too. I feel that I'm making you all roam around here for it. Not only do I want to go home, I want to ensure that you can all return home peacefully. Right now, I feel that ensuring you can leave this place safely is so much more meaningful than a map."

"Uhm! Your Majesty, let us go home!"

"Uhm! Let's go home."

I led the remaining people out of the camp. When I told them about how I exchanged the map to leave this place safely, they all showed a look of relief. Judging from their reactions, it would seem that not even Philes, Tarak and company could continue fighting. The remaining soldiers were in decent condition, but their weapons were all broken. I couldn't help but be joyous about my correct decision.

*'Though I'm reluctant to accept the outcome, I just made a decision which decided our lives. I already know very clearly what my biggest dream is. And that's to return home, back to Nier and Lucia's side, back to my loved ones' sides. I don't want to die. At least not here.'*

*'Thinking about it, I've already achieved what I wanted. As opposed to saying that I wanted the mine, it would be more correct to say that I wanted recognition from others. I wanted them to acknowledge that I am qualified to be the Prince and future Emperor. I managed to get what I wanted among countless enemies this time. Socina's people and my soldiers witnessed my efforts. I think that I can acknowledge myself after this.'*

*'It doesn't matter if we give the ore to Socina. We'll just trade it in future. However, I now hold their lord in awe and veneration after this. She really is a smart person, who also takes action. She sees everyone as chess pieces. She meticulously calculates every step. I was completely ignorant of my place in this game. I was her pawn from beginning to end.'*

*'She's too frightening. She sat on the sideline and gained without doing a thing, but only someone smart would be able to see the situation clearly. It was my mistake for not bringing Freya. If Freya was here, she might've been able to read the situation properly.'*

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"Your Majesty, you truly are a smart man. There are those who fear death everywhere. However, it is very difficult to be able give up what you have on hand. You have a very good grasp on the situation and can make the best decisions. I am very happy to be able to work with you. You most certainly are Elizabeth's child. Your intellect and decisiveness does not pale in comparison to Her Majesty. I promise you. I shall provide you with the most favourable value for this metal."

Her voice was excited and eager. She looked at the map I handed her. She could barely hold back her excitement as she sincerely continued, "However, I know that you feel somewhat upset about this. Hence, I shall wait at Socina for you to come and scold me. Your Majesty, come to Socina if you have time!"

## Ch. 50

"Castell."

Castell stood at the door and looked at the beauty lying on the bed in the room, reading the letter in front of her. He only knew that the letter came from His Majesty, which was sent from the desert. He was unclear of what the contents were; however, he could see that Her Majesty viewed it with great importance. The letter arrived yesterday. Her Majesty was so excited that she didn't eat dinner and looked at it all night. She even held it in her sleep, as though she was hugging her son.

Her majesty was always been absent-minded, ever since His Majesty left. She always looked south and spaced out whenever she was free. When night came, not even her sleep-aid medication could guarantee her a good night of sleep. That made Castell worry a bit, since it was clear that her health was deteriorating.

However, she slept well after receiving the letter.

Castell bowed as he looked at the Empress. He asked, "What are you orders, Your Majesty?"

"I shouldn't be getting involved with this under normal circumstances, but since my son has mentioned it to me, I must bring it up."

The Empress rolled over. Though she looked excited and happy after receiving her son's letter, the gaze she looked at Castell with was not a relaxed and fond one. To the contrary, it was a very stern reproaching gaze filled with criticism. Castell had never been looked at that way before. He felt his limbs feel frozen ice-cold due to her gaze as he quaked uncontrollably.

"Your Majesty, please elaborate... I... I do not understand..."

Castell muttered as he looked at the Empress. His cold sweat ran down the tip of his nose.

"You need to teach your merchant group manners. If they see His Majesty outside of the palace and don't salute him, aren't they showing disregard for their superiors?" The Empress looked at Castell. Her lips twitched before she waved her hand and continued, "That's all I wanted to say. Castell, your merchant group saw His Majesty in the desert, yet didn't salute him. Do they not recognise His Majesty, or are they doing something questionable? I know that this has nothing to do with you. However, you're their leader so I naturally speak to you if there's a problem with your subordinates."

Castell trembled and in a low-pitched voice replied: "Understood... I shall now go and set them straight."

"All right."

The Empress still trusts Castell. She didn't say anything more. She didn't even suspect anything. When she referred "shady" stuff, she never thought they'd be secretly transporting ores and firearms. In her mind, her idea of "shady" was, in the most severe case, transporting illegal goods to earn some money on the side.

"I just got news from Karnashun. His Majesty is on his way back from the desert and should soon be here."

As soon as Castell left, Alice entered her majesty's room with a letter. Elizabeth lingered for a moment and then hopped off the bed without getting dressed to snatch the letter over. She was elated as a child when she saw the

official news. She kissed the letter and then tightly hugged it. She cheerfully pulled the curtains open and shouted: “My son is coming back! My son is coming back!!!”

“Your Majesty, come back!! You are not wearing anything! You are not dressed!!”

Shall we say it was good luck or back luck?

When a few of the garden workers turned around, all they saw was a blurry shadow. I guess you’re lucky to see the body of the most beautiful woman on the continent. But if you did, then your entire family would lose their lives. So is it good luck or bad luck...?

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“Your Highness.”

Lucia looked at Vyvyan as she saluted her with a small bow. Vyvyan helped Lucia up. She stroked her Lucia’s head with a smile and said, “Lucia, you don’t need to salute me. You’re essentially my child when no outsiders are around. Moreover, you’re carrying my son’s child, so you don’t need to salute me anymore.”

“All right, Your Highness... but... but...”

Lucia’s lips budged a few times as though she found it hard to say what was on her mind.

Vyvyan watched her for a while before revealing a smile. She asked, “So you came to find out about your child’s condition, did you? What’s wrong, Lucia? Are you worried for your child?”

Lucia hesitated for a moment before answered: “... No. I am more worried about His Highness.”

It’s pointless to hide things from Vyvyan when you’re in front of her, because she’ll be able to read your mind. Lucia looked up at Vyvyan’s eyes and continued, “I am a little concerned if I will be able to give His Highness a qualified descendant... because my bloodline... my bloodline is too poor... If our child’s mana is too poor... I think that His Highness will feel really sad...”

Vyvyan looked at Lucia's expression. She appeared to be reading Lucia's mind, but at the same time as if she was just spacing out. She hesitated for a moment before looking at Lucia and replying, "I, on the other hand, think that even if your child's bloodline is poor or mana is poor, my son won't abandon you, regardless."

Lucia shook her head and then calmly responded, "I am not worried about being abandoned... It is my duty to provide His Highness with a qualified descendant. I can accept His Highness abandoning me for not fulfilling this duty... It is just that... I do not want to make His Highness sad or cause everyone to attack His Highness in the future because of his successor..."

Vyvyan looked at Lucia's gaze and softly chuckled. She rubbed her belly and then stroked Lucia's head. Her lips turned up into an eerie smile. She pulled her hand back and then softly giggled as she looked at Lucia. She then hugged her petite body and tenderly said, "Trust in my son's love for you, Lucia. The two of you have been through so much. Do you think you two would split up over this? I promise you, Lucia, you will not bring my son problems over his child. I will use some tricks to ensure that you give birth to an acceptable child. I promise you. I swear on the name of Vyvyan Galadriel that I will ensure you have an excellent descendant."

"Your Highness... Thank you... Thank you..."

Moved, Lucia hugged Vyvyan tightly. Vyvyan gently patted Lucia on her back to soothe Lucia. A moment later, Lucia wiped the corner of her eyes and released Vyvyan. Vyvyan looked to the south and softly said, "My son will soon be back. I believe that he will be back very soon to see you. When he gets back, share with him what you're thinking. You must inform my son about this sort of stuff."

"Uhm, Your Highness... Is His Highness well...?"

"He's still alive. I only know that much. Worry not, he's not in danger. If he was on the verge of death, I would've already gone there."

Vyvyan's gaze turned cold and sharp. In a slightly depressed tone, she then said, "Ever since I gave him that necklace, he has only ever called for me once. Why doesn't he ever think of his mom when he's in danger...? Why? Could it be

that he thinks I'm useless?"

"I think it must be because His Highness wants to accomplish something on his own."

"But a mom's purpose is to busy herself for her son, is it not...? My son always doing this makes me sad."

Vyvyan shook her head as though she wanted to get rid of her dissatisfaction and depressive feelings. She wore on a polite smile then stroked Lucia's head, "Let's go, Lucia. Let's go for a stroll together. Spending time in nature is good for your child's development, you know."

"You really do know so much, Your Highness!"

"That's because I gave birth to my son!"

## Ch. 51

"Tarak!!"

I saw Nara leap at Tarak and hug him tightly. I then told her, "Sorry, I might not be able to do what I promised you; but I did bring Tarak back in one piece."

"That's good enough. That's good enough. I only want Tarak. I only need Tarak." Nara wiped the corner of her eyes. Tarak's face turned red as blood after being hugged by the girl he likes and hearing her response.

I smiled as I watched the two of them. I then looked at Nara, smiled and said, "That's because it doesn't matter to you who acquired the ore, isn't that right? I bet you've spoken to Socina's people, too."

Nara pouted without a care and then replied, "Your Majesty, not putting all your eggs in one basket has been practiced since ancient times. Furthermore, I was hoping you would succeed more, since I placed Tarak in your care; hence, I held you in higher regard, thought more of you and trusted you most."

"I've let you down in that case, then."

"Not exactly. I did not suffer any losses in the end, and you brought Tarak

back safe and sound. Most importantly, if you look at the entire event, you were the one who found the mine. Your Majesty, I hold you in very high regard. You also successfully found the mine, except, you did not manage to get your hands on it. However, I think your image with your men has significantly improved after your decision to give up in the end.”

I laughed, but didn’t say anything. Nara smiled then made an invitational hand gesture and said, “You must be exhausted from the rough journey, Your Majesty. Please pardon me for the modest dishes. Please have a seat, Your Majesty.”

“Ah, all right.”

I didn’t bring Luna with me this time, and Philes didn’t come with me either.

*‘It wasn’t easy to return to Karnashun. All my men were exhausted. I didn’t give them any work today to allow them to have a day to rest. Socina’s people can be said to have fulfilled their duties on the way. Though the lord of Socina uses somewhat underhanded methods, she does keep promises. She protected us the entire way and took care of our wounded properly, so I don’t have any complaints.’*

After Nara heard our entire story, she cut off Tarak, who was intending to continue. She looked at me and asked, “Your Majesty, you must have heard of the saying ‘do not put all your eggs in one basket’, right? I think that you must have had your own considerations when you decided to hand over something that took so much effort to obtain.”

I lingered for a moment before replying, “How shall I describe it... I definitely don’t feel too good about having to hand it over...”

“But you did.” Nara looked at me with a smile as if she was saying, “don’t lie to me.” She then continued, “Your Majesty, you worked so long for the map. Would you really hand it over due to fear of death? Further, I would assume that it was a bargaining chip in your negotiations. You must have come to some sort of agreement for you to hand her your chip, right?”

I grinned. I had a mouthful of ice wine then nodded and replied, “At the time, the thought of destroying it did cross my mind. If the lord of Socina went to snatch it from me, I would’ve burnt it up. Frankly speaking, the map doesn’t

serve that much of a purpose to me, because the tribesmen are at my camp. Even without the map, they can give me an approximate location and I could just go look around the area."

Nara looked at me and with a smile, asked, "I see. But why did you choose to hand it to her in the end? Or rather, what did you exchange it for?"

"I exchanged it for her allegiance."

I looked at her and explained, "I told her that I would only hand it to her after she truly obtained the power to control Socina and supported me. This mineral is extremely important to her. She needs it more than I do. She was gambling this time, as well. If I took it, then she would lose her capital to contend with the elders. If that was how it went, then the elders wouldn't be grateful to me, because they, too, were searching for the mine. If I take it, then I won't get anything other than the mineral. On the other hand, if I supported the lord of Socina, she would subjugate her opposition. And, as I supported them, they would have to obey me. As for the mineral, I could obtain it through trade with them, and the price won't change much. Moreover, loyalty can't be purchased with money now, can it?"

Nara nodded and then placed her cup of wine down. She looked at me as though she was smiling yet not, and asked, "Your Majesty, it does not look like your ambition ends with ruling just one city. Could it be that you are after the world?"

I chuckled and replied, "If I wanted the world, all I have to do is wait. But then vassal states would look down on me, wouldn't they? My mom conquered you with her sword. If I don't accomplish anything, you would not submit to me. You might even declare independence."

"Your Majesty, are you saying that the purpose of your trip to the five nations of the desert was to show yourself to us and then have us submit to you?" Nara laughed out loud then drank a cup of wine. Her expression became slightly stern as she coldly exclaimed, "That will work on anyone, but Karnashun will not join your side or the Empress' side. Your Majesty, if you have any conflicts with Her Majesty, please do not drag Karanashun into it!"

I smiled helplessly and responded, "Since when did I make you feel that I

wanted to butt heads with Her Majesty? She's my mom. Why would I want to oppose her? Our relationship is very close. I don't have any intention of usurping the throne. I just want to prepare myself to succeed the throne. I won't have you do anything. To the contrary, I hope that you will be able to maintain your status quo after I succeed the throne."

Nara's expression relaxed a little after my response.

*'It appears that she wasn't going to participate in any conflicts that could jeopardise her city. She is a woman who puts the gains of her city above all else, after all. I'm very aware of that. I don't intend to get Karnashun to do anything for me either. I just wanted to let them know that I'm a qualified ruler, that's all.'*

"In that case, you need not worry, Your Majesty. After this event, I greatly admire you. You conquered the desert and managed to find the treasure in the desert. Based on that alone, you have surpassed the rulers of the desert by far."

"Really? I shall not hesitate to accept your compliment then."

I lifted up my cup of wine with a smile and she picked hers up to clink it with mine. We both finished them in one go. I placed my cup down and then glanced at Tarak. Tarak had his head down the entire time, not daring to look at me.

*'I really don't get it. The guy could throw his life away for Nara, so why is he scared of confessing?'*

'Whatever, I'll say it for him.'

"There's one more thing I still have to do."

"Please feel free to speak, Your Majesty. I will see that it is done, as long as it is within my capabilities."

"You can do it for sure, and you will be elated to." I looked at her and then pointed at Tarak. With a teasing smile, I said, "When we were in the desert, Tarak pleaded me to be the witness for your marriage."

"I did not!! Your Majesty, you must not make false claims!! I do not have any feelings for Nara!"

"Shut up!"

*'Are you sick in the head, boy?!!'*

## Ch. 52

"Your Majesty, have you finished up the matter with Nara and Tarak?"

I was seated at the table. While watching the sun to the west with a cup of tea in my hand, I nodded. I smiled helplessly as I touched my neck and replied, "I finally got Tarak to confess his feelings to her in the end. Nara said 'yes' without a moment of hesitation. I always said Nara was a straightforward girl. I knew they'd get together right away if Tarak confessed. All is well now. Their deal is sealed, but I have to make a trip back here in a few months."

Luna nodded. She took the cup of tea in my hand then looked at the sky outside. In a concerned voice, she said, "But, Your Majesty... Today..."

"Ah, I know. It's a full-moon night." I nodded and went on, "Let's keep it a secret. I don't want others to know that it happens to me every month. I'll be screwed if somebody takes advantage of it and tries to assassinate me. Mm, Luna, stay in my room tonight and lock the door tight. Don't open the door even if it's Philes and company."

Luna nodded and then asked, "But your condition has not been bad up until now today. Your Majesty, do you feel anything strange at the moment?"

"Anything strange...? The only strange feeling I have right now is probably that I'm not in pain." I touched my face with a smile. Normally I'd already be in so much pain I'd be losing myself. The gravitational force of the moon causes all of the mana in my body to go berserk. Normally, I'd already be lying on the bed waiting for Vyvyan or Luna already. But I wasn't in any pain at the moment. I just felt a little numb. I wonder if it's because the moon comes out later than usual in the desert or it it's because there is too little mana here."

*'Whatever the case, it doesn't seem that I'll need someone to help me tonight. This a very, very rare chance for me, because it was the first time I could enjoy gazing at the full-moon since coming here.'*

Luna looked at me slightly happy. She said, "So does that mean that you will be fine tonight? That is really good. You will not have to suffer the torment. Your Majesty, how about we just live in the desert from now...? Ah... I apologise....."

Luna quickly lowered her head and covered her mouth with a hint of sadness. Her reaction was due to her realising she said something that could be considered treason.

What she said was " ... we just live in the desert ..."

Only my two moms, Lucia and Nier had the right to say that. Luna is just a personal servant. She had no right to say that. She had no right to choose where to live because she had to obey her master's orders. She couldn't ask her master to live in a particular place. It was her master that was the one who'd tell her where to live.

I grabbed hold of Luna's hands. She looked at me a little flustered, but I chuckled and scanned her face.

Luna really is very, very beautiful. Her beauty doesn't pale in comparison to Lucia. If she were to dress up and do up her make-up properly, she would be a perfect fit for the Prince. If she was born in the palace, able to grow up by Troy's side, she would be Lucia's number one competitor for his heart.

Unfortunately, Luna wasn't that fortunate. The heavens bestowed her with beauty, but didn't give her a beautiful life, as well. Luna, who by all means could've become the Princess, ended up only being able to be His Highness' personal servant. She didn't live in a Cinderella world, for she was never going to have crystal shoes or a pumpkin carriage. His Highness had those he loved ones and could never give her a title.

This was as far as their relationship could go.

I let go of Luna's hand. I stroked her head and in a tender voice said, "Luna, bring some wine and food. Let's gaze at the moon tonight. I'm usually on a bed trying to withstand the pain on a full-moon night. I've never gazed at the moon on a full-moon night. Perhaps this is an opportunity to let me see the moon on a full-moon night for the first time."

Luna looked up. Her eyes shined with joy. She gave me a firm nod and replied, "All right, Your Majesty! If you do not mind, I shall moon-gaze with you tonight. I would like to see the moon at its biggest in the desert, too."

I sat down on the chair to the side. With my back facing her, I replied, "All right. Go and prepare then."

I heard Luna's footsteps gradually head to the door and then the sound of the door shutting. From my pocket, I took out the protective talisman that had been cut in two and began to sew it back together.

*'I can't be blamed for this. I've never done needle-work before!'*

*'This is something Nier gave me, though. When I return myself to her in one piece, I want to return this talisman to her in one piece, too. These things are all hers, after all.'*

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"Although I shouldn't be the one to say this, I don't think anything good will come out of you continuing to be immersed in your relationship like this."

Just after Luna had left with excited steps, a lazy voice came from behind. Luna paused for a moment before revealing a polite smile and turning around to give Lorana a deep bow. She responded, "Hello, Miss Lorana. May I ask if your wound has healed? I am very glad to see that you can move around."

Lorana hesitated for a moment before scratching her head and replying, "You don't need to worry about my wound. I'll be fine with some elven spring water. I'm worried about you. Luna; how much longer do you intend to continue like this? If you get more and more immersed in it, you'll bring misfortune upon yourself soon enough. You know that elves can't accept their loved one having another, right? Of course, Lucia is no exception. She lost the duel so she can't blame anyone."

Luna patiently waited for Lorana to finish. Her expression didn't even change. It was as though what Lorana spoke about had nothing to do with her.

"Is that so? So do you have any other business? If not, I need to go and prepare refreshments for His Majesty. I shall not entertain you any longer."

Once she wrapped up her reply, she made a small bow with a smile and then turned around to leave.

Lorana froze for a moment. She then grabbed Luna with one hand and sternly exclaimed, “I’m being serious with you. Don’t brush it off. Luna, you’re getting more and more addicted to staying at His Majesty’s side. You’re able to spend time alone with His Majesty, because the two of them aren’t here right now. If you get used to it and reveal your relationship to them out of carelessness, you’ll be done for. Do you realise that?! You must be careful, even if you’re a mistress. With you being so open about it, what if Nier finds out?!”

Luna tilted her head to the side and asked with puzzlement, “What are you talking about? I am just His Majesty’s personal servant. I have never thought about being his mistress or something nor have I wanted to contend with the two princesses for anything. Therefore, I do not understand what you are saying. I honestly do not have time. What are we going to do if His Majesty gets angry?”

Lorana let go of her and watched her leave right before her eyes. She blankly watched Luna’s back and opened her mouth a few times to speak, but didn’t say anything in the end.

There are some things which you can’t get over once you’ve become used to them.

But sometimes, you will forget your original identity if you immerse yourself in a role for too long, just as the young man in the desert did. If he stayed in his moms’ arms for too long, he wouldn’t be willing to leave.

But he didn’t use the necklace in the end.

It would seem that he’s no longer a mommy’s child anymore. His two moms will probably think that their son is becoming more and more similar to their husband when they see his face in the future...